Charlotte County Public Library,
Charlotte Court House, Virginia.

Pippen's Book Store
Old and

Charlotte County Library
3 0000 00031 3886

THE HALL AND THE GRANGE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE HOUSE OF MERRILEES
RICHARD BALDOCK
EXTON MANOR
THE SQUIRE'S DAUGHTER
THE ELDEST SON
THE HONOUR OF THE CLINTONS
THE GREATEST OF THESE
THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH
WATERMEADS
UPSIDONIA
ABINGTON ABBEY
THE GRAFTONS
THE CLINTONS, AND OTHERS
SIR HARRY
MANY JUNES
A SPRING WALK IN PROVENCE
PEGGY IN TOYLAND
THE HALL AND THE GRANGE

THE HALL AND THE GRANGE

A NOVEL

BY

ARCHIBALD MARSHALL

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY
1921

F
1935h

COPYRIGHT, 1921
BY DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY, INC.

The Quinn & Boden Company
BOOK MANUFACTURERS
RAHWAY NEW JERSEY

TO
WILLIAM LYON PHELPS

435

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	The Hall	1
II	The Grange	11
III	Norman	23
IV	Pamela	40
V	The Family	53
VI	Barton's Close	67
VII	Young People	79
VIII	Wellsbury	92
IX	Letters	108
X	Reconciliation	122
XI	A Question of Labour	139
XII	New Ideas	154
XIII	Discussion	169
XIV	Church and After	181
XV	The Rift	197
XVI	Crisis	211
XVII	Honours	221
XVIII	Fred Comfrey	234
XIX	Investigation	249
XX	A Question of Finance	262
XXI	Pershore Castle	271
XXII	A Summer Afternoon	285
XXIII	Approaches	302
XXIV	Almost	316
XXV	Miss Baldwin Looks On	328
XXVI	Before Christmas	343

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXVII	Two Young Men	353
XXVIII	And the Third	366
XXIX	The New Chapter	378
XXX	The Trodden Way	388
XXXI	An Ending and a Beginning . .	401

THE HALL AND THE GRANGE

CHAPTER I

THE HALL

Colonel Eldridge was enjoying an afternoon doze, or a series of dozes, in the Sabbath peace of his garden. His enjoyment was positive, for he had a prejudice against sleeping in the day-time, and sat upright in his basket chair with no support to his head; so that when sleep began to overtake him he nodded heavily and woke up again. If he had provided himself with a cushion from one of the chairs or lounges by his side, he would have slumbered blissfully, but would have been lost to the charm of his surroundings.

These included a great expanse of lawn, mown and rolled and tended to a sheeny perfection of soft rich colour; the deep shade of nobly branching trees in their dark dress of mid-July; bright flower-beds; the terraced front of a squarely built stone house of a comfortably established age. These were for the eye to rest upon after one of those heavy nods, and to carry their message of spacious seclusion and domestic well-being. For the other senses there were messages that conveyed the same meaning—the hot brooding peace of the July afternoon, tempered by the soft stirring of flower-scented breezes, the drone of bees and of insects less usefully employed, the occasional sweet pipe of birds still mindful of earlier courtships, the grateful and secure absence of less mundane sounds. The house

was empty, except for servants, who obtruded themselves neither on sight nor hearing. The tennis net on the levelled space by the rose garden hung in idle curves. Colonel Eldridge had the whole wide verdurous garden to himself, and the house, too, if he cared to enter it. Though he liked to have his family around him as a general rule, he found it pleasant to keep his own company thus for an hour or so.

He was just approaching the time when one of those droops which punctuated his light slumbers would wake him up to a more lively sense of well-being, and he would take up the book that lay on his knee, when his half-closed eyes took in a figure emerging from the trees among which the lawn lost itself at the lower end of the garden. He aroused himself and waved a welcoming hand, which meant among other things: "Here you have a wide-awake man reading a book on Sunday afternoon, but you need not be afraid of disturbing him." The grateful lassitude, however, which enveloped his frame prevented his rising to greet his brother, who came towards him with an answering wave of the hand, and took a seat by his side.

There was not much difference in the age of the two brothers, which was somewhere in the fifties. In appearance, also, they were something alike, of the same height and build, and with the same air of wearing their years well. Colonel Eldridge had the military caste impressed upon him, with closely cropped hair underneath his straw hat, small grey moustache, and a little net-work of wrinkles about his keen blue eyes. His

clothes were neat and unobtrusive, as of a man who gets the best tailoring and leaves it at that.

Sir William Eldridge also, quite obviously, got the best tailoring. He wore a suit of soft brown, with boots polished to an enviable pitch; the narrow sleeves of his jacket, ornamented with four buttons, showed the doubled-over cuffs of his blue flannel shirt, fastened with enamelled links; a gay bandana tie heightened the agreeable contrast of blue and brown; his soft felt hat was of light grey, with a black band. With a new pair of chamois leather gloves he would have been beautifully dressed for any occasion that did not demand a silk hat and whatever should go with it. But he wore or carried no gloves for a walk of half a mile across the fields, by the river, from Hayslope Grange, where he lived, to Hayslope Hall, his brother's house. He had the same regularity of feature as his brother; his hair was a shade or two greyer, but he looked some years younger, with his fresh skin and his active figure. There was almost an exuberance about him. If Colonel Eldridge had allowed his hair to grow longer than convention demanded, it would only have looked as if it wanted cutting. If Sir William had done so it would have seemed natural to his type.

"Been having a little nap?" he said, as he dropped into a chair by his brother's side.

Colonel Eldridge flinched ever so little. His strict regard for truth forbade him to deny the charge, but it should not have been brought against him. "Couldn't have much of a nap sitting up in a chair like this," he said, rather brusquely.

Sir William ignored this. "How jolly and peaceful it is here," he said. "Really, I don't know a more delicious garden than this anywhere. It would take a hundred years to produce just this effect at the Grange, though I've spent pots of money over the gardens there."

"Gardening with a golden spade," said his brother. "You can't do everything with money."

"You can do a good deal. And if you've got big trees you can do practically everything. The misfortune about the Grange is that there are no big trees immediately around the house. If there had been I should have aimed at something of this sort. I could have got the lawn all right. It's the best sort of garden to look out on—an expanse of lawn and shady trees—quiet and green and peaceful. You're quite right, Edmund. With all I've done, and all I've spent on my garden, it's fussy compared to this. You remember I wanted you to do certain things here, when I first got keen on the game. Well, I'm glad you didn't. If you had, I should have wanted you to undo them by this time."

Colonel Eldridge smiled, his momentary pique forgotten. "Oh, well, people come miles to see your garden," he said. "It's worth seeing. But on the whole I'd rather have this one to live in."

"Ah, that's it; you've just hit it. There's all the difference between a garden to look at and a garden to live in. I've come to see that, and I suppose you've always seen it. I generally do come around to your views in the long run, old fellow. In this matter of a

lawn shaded by trees, I've come round so completely that I've got to have it, though I'm afraid I can't have it to walk straight out of the house onto, and to look at from my windows. But there's that four-acre field—Barton's Close—down by the wood. I want to bring that in—I suppose you'll have no objection. By thinning out a bit, so as to leave some of the bigger trees isolated, and planting judiciously, I can get the effect there."

"Rather a pity to cut up old pasture, isn't it? And it must be half a mile from the house."

"Oh, nothing like as much as that—not more than five hundred yards, I should say. I wish it were nearer; but it will be effective to lead down to it by a path through the corner of the wood. You'll come upon a charming, restful, retired place that you hadn't been expecting. I only wish the lake had been closer, so as to have brought that in; but I think we could get a vista by cutting down a few trees. I might ask you to consider that later on; but we'd better see how the lawn turns out first."

"I don't think I should want to cut down trees there, William. Whatever distance Barton's Close may be from the Grange, the lake is certainly over a mile. You can't turn the whole place into a garden. As it is, it's overweighted. You've got to consider the future. It would have been all right if poor Hugo had lived. He'd have succeeded me here, and I suppose Norman would have gone on living at the Grange after you."

"Oh, I know, old fellow, but—"

"Let me finish. When I die, and you or Norman come here, Cynthia and the girls will have to live at the Grange. It's much too big a place for them already. I dare say you'd get a big rent for it; but that's not what they'll want. They would have had enough to live on there as it used to be; but with the way things are going now it'll be a place that will want a lot of keeping up. It will want a good deal more keeping up than this."

"Of course you're right to think about the future, old fellow." Sir William spoke more slowly, leaning forward in his chair with his elbows on his knees and tapping his stick on the turf. "I've thought about it a good deal, too. Things are altered now—unfortunately. I come into it more, don't I?—I and Norman."

"Oh, yes, of course. Still, I'm not an old man yet. And Cynthia. . . . It's not out of the question. . . . But we needn't think of that. The chances are you'll succeed me. But for a good many years yet—in the ordinary way—I shall be here at Hayslope, and—"

He did not finish, and Sir William did not help him out. He frowned a little as he sat looking down on the grass and tapping his stick, but there was no alteration in the kindly tone of his speech when he said after a time: "If Cynthia bears you another son, nobody will be more pleased than I shall. Some people might think I didn't mean that, but you know better. That's why we can talk over the future between us without misunderstanding one another."

Colonel Eldridge stirred in his seat. "Oh, yes, Bill,"

he said. "You don't want to step into my shoes yet a while. I know that well enough. You will step into them sooner or later. I know that, too. We shan't have any more children. And as for what's to come after us, Norman will make a better squire of Hayslope than poor Hugo could have done. I wouldn't say so to Cynthia—I don't know that I'd say it to anybody but you—but I've come to see that the poor fellow had made too much of a mess of things for us to have hoped that he'd ever pull up. I feel no bitterness against him—God knows. I did; but that's all wiped out. I loved him when he was a little fellow, and I never really left off loving him, though he brought me a lot of trouble. Now I'm free to love his memory. He did well at the end."

"Oh, yes. You can be proud of him. There was lots of good in him, and it came out at the last. No need to think about all the rest. I haven't thought about it for a long time."

"Well, I've got to think of it occasionally, I'm afraid. Things are still difficult because of poor Hugo. But—"

"Look here, old fellow—why don't you let me wipe all that off? I can do it without bothering myself in the least."

"Thanks, Bill, you're very good. But I'll bear my own burdens."

"Between you and me—what is there to quibble about? I've been lucky in life. But you're a better man than I am, when all's said and done. And you're the head of the family. We ought to stand together

—'specially now, when I'm almost in the same position towards you as Hugo was, you might say. Take it as done for Hayslope. In a way, I'm as much interested in the place as you are."

"Thanks, William, but this is a personal matter. Most of my income comes from the place, but I'm only tenant for life. I've got to make good on my own account. It means a bit of skimping, but that's all. There's enough for me and Cynthia and the girls, and I'll hand over Hayslope to you, or whoever it may be, as I received it from our father."

"Well, I won't press you. But you know at any time that the money's there if you want it, and you'll give me pleasure if you'll take it. What's money between you and me? I've been in the way of making it and you haven't. There you have it in a nutshell. But after all, I'm not a money-grubber. I only care for it for what it will bring. It's at your service any time, Edmund—five thousand, ten thousand—whatever you want to clear off that old trouble. Take it from me, that you'll be doing me a real pleasure if you'll ask for it at any time. Are you coming over to tea? I promised Eleanor I'd get back. I think there'll be some people from the Castle."

He rose from his seat. Colonel Eldridge retained his. "I don't think I'll come, thanks," he said, with a slight frown. "I don't particularly care about meeting people from the Castle."

Sir William looked away. There was a slight frown on his face now, but not of annoyance. "I know it's rather difficult for you," he said. "But wouldn't it be

better to face it? You must meet them sooner or later. And as far as they are concerned, it's all over. There'd be no real awkwardness. As a matter of fact I don't think that the Crowboroughs are coming themselves. It's the Branchleys—who are staying with them. If they do come, there'd be more or less of a crowd—with all the young people. You'd get over the first meeting, and then it would all be buried."

"I know I've got to meet them some time or other. I know that Crowborough did have cause for complaint against Hugo. But he went much too far, and I can never forget it, now the poor boy's dead."

"You couldn't have forgotten it if he hadn't taken back the worst of what he accused Hugo of. I admit that. But he did take it back, didn't he?"

"Well, did he? That's what I'm not so sure about. I've got to behave as if he did—I know that. If we were to have it out together again, there's likely to be such a row that we should be enemies for life. I don't want that, for the sake of Cynthia and the girls. I suppose he doesn't want it, either, or he wouldn't have tried to mend the row we did have."

"But, surely—"

"I know what you're going to say. He wrote and said he'd never intended to accuse Hugo of swindling young Horsham. It was the way I'd taken what he did say that made him lose his temper and go farther than he'd meant to. That's all very well. But he didn't withdraw the charge."

There was a look of perplexity on Sir William's face as he stood by his brother, preparing to leave him,

but not to leave the discussion into which they had so lightly drifted with a ragged edge of uncertainty. "Poor Hugo!" he said. "He made trouble for you, Edmund—for all of us. It's all forgiven and ought to be forgotten. But where it remains alive it ought to be faced, oughtn't it? He did lead Jim Horsham into bad ways. You've admitted as much as that."

"Yes, I did admit it. It was bad enough. But to say that a son of mine cheated a brother officer out of a large sum of money—! That was the accusation."

"Crowborough made it when he was worked up about what he had discovered, and he withdrew it."

It was Colonel Eldridge who ended the discussion, and allowed his brother to go free. "Well, that's what we began with," he said. "I'm ready to act on the supposition that he did withdraw it. But I don't feel inclined to meet him this afternoon, William. Thanks all the same."

Sir William took his departure. His brother watched his smart, alert figure crossing the lawn, until it was lost among the trees at the bottom of the garden. Then he rose and sauntered slowly towards the house, and his face was thoughtful and disturbed—more disturbed than the previous conversation might have seemed to warrant.

CHAPTER II

THE GRANGE

Sir William Eldridge, with a step wonderfully light and quick for a man of his years and weight, came out of his brother's garden by a gate that led to a woodland path, and so down a long slope under the thick shade of trees, till the wood gave place to an open meadow bordered by a placid-flowing stream—almost a river. The meadow sloped up to the high woods which enclosed it in a long crescent, but on the other side of the stream was open grass-land, with lines of willows here and there, dykes, and little bits of wooden fences. Cattle were dotted all over it, feeding peacefully in the hot afternoon sunshine, or recumbent on the rich turf. In the distance were more woods, and where the river took a turn and followed the contour of the hill in front, it was seen to be flowing towards a lake of considerable size, to judge by the growth of the trees which encircled and hid all but the nearer end of it.

The river path continued for a quarter of a mile or so, and then once more became a woodland path, turning sharply to the left and rising more steeply than it had dropped in the other wood. The exit there had been by a stile, not as firm as it might have been under the weight of a big man. But this entrance was by a closely fitting gate, and a new solid fence ran

away to right and left of it, gate and fence alike carrying an elaborate wire defence against rabbits.

Sir William climbed the steep path, slowly, but not, apparently, because of any necessity to save his breath. He looked to right and left of him with interest at the plantings of shrubs and flowers and ferns that had been made in clearings under the trees. On the outside this was a thick wood, as the other had been; but once through the gate it was seen to be a garden, full of interest and surprise. Little winding paths led off from the main ascent, and Sir William followed one or two of these to look at some treasure that he had established, and lingered over it as if his chief interest in life were the planting and the growth of flowers.

The steep path became a rocky staircase, which emerged from the wood into an elaborate rock garden, so artfully constructed that it seemed almost a natural outcrop from the leafy soil. On the further side the trees closed in on it again, but they had been still further thinned out here and did not conceal the artificially flat expanse of tennis and croquet lawn upon which the path came somewhat too suddenly. Immediately beyond the lawn was a house—a long rambling structure of many-gabled red brick and tile, with rose-covered verandas, loggias, pergolas, and all the paraphernalia of a rich man's country cottage. The original house, of a date somewhere about the seventies, was ugly enough, and had never pretended to be a cottage; and the additions, though in much better architectural taste, were incongruous to it. But it might have been supposed, even from an outside view,

that everything about this house would be of the highest possible convenience for a life of country pleasure, and that if anything should occur to its occupants that would improve its amenities in this respect it would promptly be supplied.

Four young people were playing lawn tennis, and four older people were playing croquet, as Sir William came within sight of the lawn, and on the broad pillared veranda which finished off the house at this end other people were sitting, and servants were arranging tea-tables. House and garden seemed to be fulfiling their purpose with these groups of people laughing and talking and playing games in the summer afternoon, and everything at hand to enhance their enjoyment. Sir William's face lightened as he waved his greetings. He loved these lively gatherings of the summer time. He had something to offer at Hayslope Grange that people found it worth while to seek out and enjoy. There was more coming and going between the Grange and Pershore Castle, the Earl of Crowborough's seat five miles away, than between the Castle and Hayslope Hall, although the two families had run neck and neck in this part of the country for generations, and intimacy had established itself between their two houses almost to the exclusion of others.

It was with Lord Crowborough that Sir William walked down to the meadow which he wanted to bring into his garden, while the rest of the party were still busy round the tea-tables. Lord Crowborough was a man of sixty, heavy in bulk and somewhat heavy in

demeanour, though with a kindly expression of face and of speech that relieved him of the charge of pomposity. He was disturbed, it appeared, at the coolness that had arisen between him and his old friend and neighbour, Edmund Eldridge, and wanted a word about it alone with Sir William. "Such old friends!" was the burden of his regrets. And he enlarged on it: "Surely such old friends ought to be able to speak freely to one another—even lose their tempers; we both did that, but surely—"

Sir William was more silent under the complaints than would have seemed to be natural to him. "It was the charge of swindling," he said rather shortly.

"Oh, I know," said Lord Crowborough. "After all your kindness, one doesn't want—"

"Never mind about that," Sir William interrupted him almost peremptorily. There was a hint in his manner that spoke of another man than the one who grew his flowers and welcomed his friends at Hayslope Grange. Lord Crowborough, some years older, and of greater apparent importance, seemed to bow to it. "I know it was never to be mentioned," he said, apologetically. "Very well. But really, you know, William—! Well, the poor fellow's dead; but he was an out and out wrong 'un. I did do my best to hush it all up. Edmund must know that. If it had come out he'd have been kicked out of the regiment. I should think he must know that, too, if he thinks straight about it at all."

"Perhaps he doesn't think quite straight about it, poor old chap! You can hardly blame him. As far

as I'm concerned I'm going to do all I can to encourage him to think that Hugo was just sowing his wild oats, and that he'd have settled down to be a credit to his name. I'm afraid it isn't true, but surely it's a good thing if Edmund can think so."

"Oh, yes, I quite agree. Poor old fellow! I'll ask him to dine. I remember him quite well as a little fellow—you too, of course. I believe I was even a sort of hero of his when I was a big boy and he was a little one."

Sir William laughed. "Of course you were," he said. "I think that's the line to go on, you know. Old times, and all that. At least, I shouldn't mention the affair again, if I were you. Treat him with—well, affection. I know you feel that for him. The row will pass over. He's sore all round. He's sore about Hugo. He's a little sore about my stepping into the position of heir to him—though, goodness knows, *I've* no wish to change places with him in any way."

"No, you've made yourself a bigger man than he is."

"Well, that's as may be. Anyhow, I'm in a different line altogether. He's nothing to be sore about there; and we stick together. I can help him in lots of ways, if he'll let me."

"He's stiff about things; he's got stiffer as he's got older."

"Yes, that's true. He's the military type; and going back to his old job during the war has brought it out in him, more than ever. Still, I know well enough how to deal with men of that sort—had lots of practice at it lately. And Edmund's my brother. I'm fond of

him. In some ways I look up to him; he's straight and honest as the day. And he's affectionate, too, under his stiffness. You can't drive him, but you can lead him, if you're careful in the way you do it. Hold out a hand to him, Crowborough. He'll respond all right, and you'll soon git rid of *that* soreness."

They strolled back to the upper garden together, and Lord Crowborough lost no time in goading his wife into asking Mrs. Eldridge to dine. It was necessary to detach her from the side of Lady Eldridge and draw her a little aside, and it was plain to everybody that something in the way of pressure was being exercised. Lady Crowborough did not want to invite the Eldridges. She was more incensed against Colonel Eldridge than her husband, and had no memory of intimacies of early childhood to soften her towards him. However, she obeyed her husband, as a good wife should. She had not yet had any conversation with Mrs. Eldridge, and might even have been supposed to have avoided her. But she went straight up to her and said: "We haven't really seen anything of each other for months. I wish you and your husband and Pamela would come over and dine to-morrow evening. Lord and Lady Branchley aren't going until Tuesday, and I've asked the Hobkirks and one or two other people."

Mrs. Eldridge looked up at her from the cushioned chair in which she was sitting, so very much at her ease, showing the neatest feet and ankles under her short-skirted summer frock. A wonderful woman for her age, it was the custom to say of her. Her age

might have been forty-five, but she looked at least ten years younger than that, and on some occasions younger still. There was not a thread of grey in her rippling, lustrous brown hair; her cheeks were softly rounded, her skin was fresh. She wore a large flowery hat, which accentuated the graceful slimness of her form. She looked up at Lady Crowborough, looming profusely above her, out of untroubled blue eyes. "Thanks so much," she said. "I'm not sure what Edmund is doing to-morrow. Pamela and I could come. I could let you know if *he* can't."

Lady Crowborough grunted. She was a tall, upright woman with a decorative façade, and seemed to have been formed by nature to play the part of a great lady. But there was something lacking in her equipment. She was easily flustered, and when confronted with any difficulty seemed to lose even in physical bulk. "Crowborough particularly wanted me to ask Colonel Eldridge," she said in a tone that did not carry out the promise of the preliminary grunt.

"So I saw," said Mrs. Eldridge, with unbaffled sweetness. "It was very good of him. I don't see in the least why he shouldn't come, but it's never safe to make promises for him. If you don't want me and Pamela without him—"

"Oh, of course I do, if he *can't* come. Yes, of course I shall be delighted. It's really ages since we saw anything of one another."

She suddenly became friendly and confidential, dropping into a seat next to Mrs. Eldridge's, and demanding her ear for a low-spoken account of the trouble she

had been going through with a laundry maid who had unwisely loved a Canadian soldier. Mrs. Eldridge was all sympathy, but managed to impart some lightness into an affair that Lady Crowborough had never thought to regard as anything but a gloomy tragedy. When she took leave of her Lady Crowborough's manner was intimately affectionate. She kissed her and called her "my dear," and said what a comfort it was to pour out one's troubles to an old friend.

Afterwards, in conversation with her husband, she was a little doubtful whether she had not gone rather too far. "Of course I have known her for a good many years," she said. "And I've always liked her too. But the fact is, I like her better when I'm with her than when I'm away from her; I don't know why. She's got a sort of way with her."

"She's a very charming woman," said Lord Crowborough. "I've nothing against her at all. I don't know why you shouldn't like her when you're away from her. Anyhow, I'm glad you made a bit of a fuss with her. And evidently she responded, from what you say. No doubt she wants this trouble ended. So do we. Poor old Edmund! I've forgiven him for what he said, though 'pon my word it was outrageous."

"Well, I said I never would forget it," said Lady Crowborough. "And really, John, when I come to think of it, I'm not at all sure you're right in making it so plain that *we* are anxious to see Colonel Eldridge back on the old terms with us. Perhaps he'll even refuse my invitation, and we shall have given him a handle. If he does come, of course I shall be polite to

him, but I've no intention of treating him in the same way as I have Cynthia."

"Well, I don't suppose you'll kiss him; but I'm quite sure you won't treat him stiffly, my dear. You may begin like that, but you're incapable of keeping it up."

Lady Crowborough sighed. "I *am* like that," she admitted. "I get carried away."

When the party from Pershore Castle had driven off, Lady Eldridge took her sister-in-law into the house, leaving the young people still at their games, and Sir William, who had changed into gleaming white, playing with them. Lady Eldridge was a handsome dark-eyed, dark-haired woman, very well preserved for her years, which were about the same as those of Mrs. Eldridge, but without the look of fragile youth that was the note of that lady's appearance in her most favourable moments. She had an agreeable, decisive manner of speech, and a straightforward, honest look. The two of them had been friends at school, and it was at Hayslope Hall that Lady Eldridge had first met her husband, at that time a young barrister, not entirely briefless, or he would not have been in a position to marry, but with nothing in his prospects to indicate the opulence that he now so much enjoyed.

Lady Eldridge's special room was the most recent addition to the house, pleasing in its proportions and decoration, and beautifully but quietly furnished. Mrs. Eldridge sank into a deep cushioned chair, and said with a plaintive sigh: "I wish I could afford a room like this. You've made such a perfect success of it, Eleanor. I don't think it could possibly be nicer."

"It's very sweet of you to say so, my dear. But I don't think you have any cause to grumble, with all the beautiful old things you have in your room. Of course these are mostly old, too, but then they have all been bought. I might easily have gone wrong, you know. You don't think it looks like just money, do you?"

"Oh, no! Oh, no!" Mrs. Eldridge held up hands of expostulation. Then she dropped the subject. "The Crowboroughs want to bury the hatchet," she said. "I'm glad enough. I do hate rows, especially between old friends. But my poor old Edmund had a lot to put up with. I suppose Lord Crowborough means well. It's what everybody says of him. It's what they generally do say of thoroughly tiresome people, isn't it?—especially if they've got titles. Of course he is tiresome, and so is she, but both of them have their uses, so one puts up with it."

Lady Eldridge laughed. Her laugh was agreeable to listen to, and always meant that she was amused. "What uses?" she asked.

"Well, there's the Castle to go to, for one thing."

"You used to bewail your lot in being expected to go so much to the Castle."

"My dear, I've grown wiser, as well as a good deal poorer. Nobody can deny that the Castle is desperately dull, entirely owing to the people who inhabit it; for it's a fine enough house. But they do occasionally have people to stay, though I don't know whether you've noticed that the same people seldom come twice. It's a house to go to. To that I've come—that I'm thankful for an invitation to dine at Pershore Castle.

I'm not sure that I didn't even angle for it. I certainly intimated that if Edmund didn't think it good enough, the invitation was on no account to be withdrawn from Pam and me. I made eyes at her, and she gave in at once. She thinks I'm a very sweet woman, until she goes away from me, and then she's not so sure about it. Am I a sweet woman, Eleanor, or a bit of a cat? I'm never quite certain."

"You were a very sweet child," said Lady Eldridge, whose face had become rather serious during this speech. "I always loved you and always shall. And as long as you say everything you think to me . . ."

"Oh, my dear, I shall always do that. You're one of the few comforts left to me in life. I can't grumble to Edmund, or the children. Besides, you're so generous. I should never have had my little bit of London this year but for you. How I should have missed it! And how I enjoyed it! There is no doubt that one does enjoy pleasures that come to one unexpectedly more than those that one takes as a matter of course."

"Well, Cynthia, you know that until you have a house of your own again in London, ours is there for you to come to whenever you like. And for the girls too. It doesn't want saying, does it, dear? We've always been very close together. There was a time when I owed almost all my pleasures in life to you, and I don't forget how generous *you* were. We've been fortunate, Bill and I, and at a time when so many people have had to alter their way of living. It's nice to think that our good fortune is of use not only to ourselves; that those we love can share it with us. I

suppose there aren't many people who are so close together as you and Edmund and Bill and I. And our children too. I can't imagine anything that would come between us."

"No," said Mrs. Eldridge. "I can't either. It's a great comfort to have you here. I don't know what we should do without you."

CHAPTER III

NORMAN

Norman Eldridge and his cousin Pamela detached themselves from the tennis players and strolled off through the bare blaze of the upper garden with its elaborate architecture of walls and steps and pavings and pergolas, and its bright, restless plantings, into the shade of the woods.

They were close friends, these two, and had been so ever since Norman as a boy of eight had fallen in love with Pamela as a baby of two. It's a nice sort of boy who loves children, and Norman had been a very attractive small boy, high-spirited, energetic and mischievous, but never a source of anxiety with his mischievousness, as his cousin Hugo had been. Hugo was a year older than Norman, and always eager to make his seniority felt. In those early days Norman had paid visits from the little house in Hampstead where his parents then lived, to Hayslope Hall, and greatly enjoyed the ample life of the country house, with ponies to ride, the river to fish, later on rabbits and birds to shoot, and all the blissful freedom of the woods and fields. But Hugo, his constant companion in holiday activities, had spoilt a good deal of the pleasure of them. At first Norman had given way and been bullied. It seemed as if Hugo were unable to enjoy himself without being unpleasant. He was

bigger and stronger than Norman, and had all the advantage of being on his own ground. In earlier visits, when both children had been under the eye of nurses and governess, there had been frequent quarrels, but Hugo had been forced more or less to behave himself. But during that month of Christmas holidays, when Hugo had come home from his first term at school, he had turned Norman's excitement and pleasure into a dragging unhappiness, which increased so much that he came to count the days before the end of his visit as eagerly as he had counted those which had brought him to it.

Hugo, as a schoolboy, tyrannized over him, and yet he wanted him for his games, and hardly ever left him in peace. There was another boy, a year older than Hugo —Fred Comfrey, son of the Rector of Hayslope—who was constantly with them. He took his line from Hugo, and helped in the bullying. Poor little Norman used to cry himself to sleep every night, but it was his pride never to let his tormentors see how much they hurt him. His uncle and aunt were kind to him. It would sometimes come over him with a sense of bewilderment how little they knew of his real feelings; for everything seemed to be right when the boys were with them. No doubt they thought he was enjoying himself to the full, having everything that a boy could want to make him happy.

It was at this time that he came to adore little Pamela, whose bright prattle and pretty, loving ways with him soothed his sore heart. But it was only now and then that he could forget himself, playing with her.

The other boys were brutally scornful of his taste for the companionship of a baby.

He did not go to Hayslope again until a year later. By that time he was a schoolboy himself. He had thought a good deal about his cousin Hugo, and about Fred Comfrey, in the interval, and come to the conclusion, assisted by an intimate friend of his own age to whom he had disclosed the matter, that he had been a bally ass to be put down by them.

He had entered the republic of his school with unhappy anticipations of the life he would lead there, with forty tyrants to domineer over him instead of two. If it had not been for his experience with Hugo and Fred, he would have escaped months of anticipatory dread. But his fears proved groundless. This was a very good school for small boys, with a headmaster whose outstanding aim was to make friends of them all and to keep them happy. He was helped by his wife, who loved children and had none of her own. The forty boys were her family, and outside school hours they used the whole house as if it were their home. Under this happy rule there were no awkward fences for a little boy new to school life to surmount. He was welcomed as a member of the family, and one who was expected to do it credit. Everything was done to bring out whatever originality of character he had in him. The elder boys, taking their tone from the headmaster, his wife and assistants, were kind and protective. The only objection to the system was that a new boy of self-assertive habits occasionally made himself something of a nuisance. But the standards and

ideals of school life soon told on all but the incorrigibles; the headmaster knew when and how to exercise severity on the rare occasions on which it was required; and if a boy had not submitted himself to the tone of the school by the end of his first year his parents were asked to remove him. That sometimes made trouble for the headmaster, but he was content to put up with that now and then for the sake of his beloved school.

Norman, after a pause of bewilderment, expanded under this treatment. He was gay and bright and bubbling over with life; he was quick with his work and had an aptitude for the pursuits that are valued among boys. He was made much of from the first, but his native modesty prevented his being spoilt.

It was this agreeable modesty of his that had led him to knuckle under to Hugo and Fred the year before, and they had taken advantage of it. He went down to Hayslope with his father and mother for Christmas with the determination to knuckle under in nothing, and rather enjoyed, though with some tremors, the prospect of making it quite plain where he stood, and where he intended to stand for the future. He had learnt to box a little at school, and thought it might come in useful. He didn't suppose that he was capable of taking on Hugo and Fred together, but if it should be necessary he was not averse from trying.

To his immense surprise, however, Hugo greeted him affably, and seemed to have forgotten the disagreeables of the previous visit. They played together with no more than the normal amount of friction between small

boys, and settled their differences as they arose without coming anywhere near to blows.

Then Fred Comfrey, who had spent Christmas away from home, came on the scene. Now was the time for the three of them to take stock of one another. So far, Norman had been content to make friends with an apparently much improved Hugo, without bothering himself about whether he would have liked him if he had seen him in contact with other boys. In the give and take of school life a boy finds his level very quickly. He is known through and through, and sized up with an accuracy seldom at fault, though the rule by which he is measured is more rigid than any that is applied in after life. Outside, the rule is somewhat relaxed. Boys not acceptable to their fellows may find themselves liked by older people, and show themselves in an altogether different light. The ordinary courtesies of life, disregarded at school, have some sway. There is the softening influence of feminine and family society. A truce is called, and allowances unconsciously made. So it was with Hugo and Norman, who were not made to run together, but managed to find some community of interest in the pursuits of holiday time.

But with the advent of the third party new adjustments had to be made. There was a pause of observation, and then the struggle began.

The Rector's son was a stocky, dark-haired boy of considerable strength for his age. He was already at one of the minor public schools, where they took boys from the age of eleven. His manners were rough, as his school was, and his ideals did not include that of any

sort of courtesy, though he was retiring enough in the company of his elders.

Hugo was as tall as Fred, but not nearly so broad or strong. He was dark, too, and good-looking in boy fashion, though not remarkably so. His manners were agreeable in grown-up society, and Norman had lately found them inoffensive when not affected by outside influences. In a very short time it was to be proved whether he would keep up his new-found amity with his cousin or put himself on Fred's side against him. His character was weak, and a year before Fred had played upon it, ostensibly following his lead, because with unpleasant precocity he recognized his superiority of place, but actually pushing him into the attitude that suited his inclinations.

Now came Norman's second surprise. During the pause of observation which came before the three of them settled down to the respective places which their characters and experience had earned for them, Fred seemed to realize that Norman partook in some measure of Hugo's superiority. It would have been marked enough to anybody who had seen the three of them together. The frankness of demeanour which had been encouraged by Norman's short experience of admirably conducted school life formed a significant contrast with Fred's clumsy diffidence in presence of his elders and his sniggering audacities when released from restraint. He was an unpleasant boy even at that early age, and Norman instinctively disliked him from the first moment of the second period of intimacy, and was inclined to hug his dislike.

It was he who made the breach that presently came. Otherwise, Fred would have kept the peace, and they would have got on as long as they were together without an open quarrel.

Three-year-old Pamela was the cause of it. Norman had found her more entrancing than ever, and had made no attempt to hide his love for her during the week before Fred had come on the scene. Hugo had grumbled sometimes when Norman had wanted to play with her, and he had wanted him to do something else, but there had been no repetition of the contempt that this unmanly preference for the society of a baby had previously called forth. Hugo was rather fond of his little sister, though he never put himself out to amuse her.

On the third day after Fred's arrival he came up to the hall immediately after breakfast, all agog for the game devised the evening before.

It had been snowing hard, then and through the night, and now it was a glorious, sparkling morning, with the garden and the park and the woods all muffled in white, under a frost which bound the whole landscape into gleaming, motionless beauty. The boys had found a pair of Canadian snowshoes in a lumber-room. They were to use them for a game of Indian trackers in the woods, and had agreed upon their several parts, not without some dispute, but on the whole amicably. Hugo and Fred were eager to be off at once. So was Norman, but he was rolling on the floor of the hall when Fred arrived, Pamela pursuing him with shrieks of laughter, and did not at once respond to Fred's

urgings. When they were repeated with impatience he responded still less. He wasn't going to be ordered about by Fred, and his latent hostility impelled him to make it plain to him that the more insistent the summons the less quickly would it be obeyed. When Hugo added his impatient word, he said: "All right, you go out and begin, if you're in such a hurry. I'll come when I'm ready."

The two boys flung off grumbling, and Norman played with Pamela until a nurse came to fetch her. Then he set out to join them, not without some tremors over the reception he would meet with. But there was something not altogether disagreeable about these tremors, and he grinned widely, though he was not in the least amused, as he turned the corner of the house and saw Hugo and Fred sitting on a snow-covered log at the edge of the wood some distance off. Curiously enough, this scene came back to him vividly ten years later as he was crouching under the lee of a trench in Flanders, waiting for the signal to attack a more formidable foe. And, though he didn't know it, there was actually the same grin on his face when the signal came.

He walked slowly across the park towards them, stepping rather carefully in the footmarks that one of them had made in the snow. When he got within hailing distance of them he called out: "Haven't you tried the snowshoes yet?"

There was no reply. They had their heads together and Fred was eyeing him balefully.

When he got near them Fred rose from his seat, and

said: "Look here, we're not going to stand this any longer."

"Well, then sit it," replied Norman, rather pleased with the readiness of the repartee.

Fred looked uglier than usual, but his next speech was more in the tone of reason than Norman had expected. "You're the youngest of the three of us," he said. "You're not going to keep us hanging about waiting for you when we've all settled on something to do. The cheek of it!"

Norman glanced at Hugo, who still sat on the log. There was nothing in his face yet to show whether he was hostile or not. He looked more interested than anything, and it came home to Norman that if he got the better of Fred, Hugo need no longer be feared as an adversary.

"Well, I'm sorry I kept you waiting," said Norman. "But I'm here now, so let's begin."

Fred was still inclined for argument. "I'm the oldest," he said, "but we're both here to play with Hugo, I suppose. As you're staying with him, naturally he doesn't like to make too much fuss over your cheek. But—"

"He didn't mind making a fuss last year," interrupted Norman, "and you sucked up to him and helped him. I was a bally ass to stand it then, and I'm not going to stand it now."

Fred made a threatening gesture. "Sucking up!" he repeated. "You'd better be careful what you say."

Hugo still held aloof, hunched up on the log, with

his hands in his pockets. Somehow Norman felt it necessary to bring him in. "He does suck up to you," he said. "*I'm* not going to, you know."

Hugo stirred uneasily, and said: "It's quite true what he says. It's cheek keeping us waiting like this for a quarter of an hour."

"To play with a baby," added Fred with scorn. It was the charge, so frequently brought, which had hurt him the year before. But it hurt him no longer. "I like playing with little Pam," he said. "So does Hugo sometimes, when you're not here. You'd like it too, if you weren't such a dirty scug."

This was the turning-point. Fred made another gesture of attack, but did not follow it up. If he had done so the battle would have been short and sharp, and whoever had won—it must have been he—bad blood would have been let off and the three boys would have settled down together. Instead, he turned to Hugo. "Really, that's a bit too much!" he said angrily. "Shall I teach him his lesson?"

Hugo rose. "Oh, let's chuck it," he said. "What's the good of scrapping when there's a game to play?"

They played their game, which none of them enjoyed. The contest had seemed to be quite indecisive, but Norman had won it hands down. It was Hugo, the weakest character of the three, who was the decisive factor. Fred deferred to him, and lost ground by doing so. Norman made no effort to gain ascendancy over him, being content with equal terms, but his ascendancy none the less became marked. Because he disliked Fred, finding something in him antagonistic to all the clean

ideals in which he had been reared, Hugo came rather to dislike him too. Fred met this attitude with deprecation, which made matters worse. He began to be cold-shouldered, and towards the end of the holidays his society was as much as possible dispensed with.

The next time that Norman came to Hayslope, in the summer, Fred had made his ground good again, having become necessary to Hugo in the meantime. There was no quarrel this time, but Norman never liked Fred, and their intimacy was only on the surface. He didn't like Hugo much either, or wouldn't have liked him if he had known him at school among a lot of other boys. But there was some sense of relationship and he was part of Hayslope Hall and all its keen delights.

As the years of boyhood went by, the cousins remained friends in some sort. But Norman's lead became more pronounced. Hugo went to Harrow, which was his father's school. William Eldridge by this time had left the Bar to engage in commerce, and was already beginning to make money. Norman was sent to Eton. When he had been there a year his foot was on the ladder. He was one of those boys to whom success in school life comes naturally, while Hugo was a potential rotter, destined to remain in the ruck, unless he should emerge from it for some discreditable reason.

When Norman was fifteen and Fred nearly eighteen, the antagonism between them at last found its vent. Fred had grown into a lout of a boy, whose only saving grace was athleticism. He was already in his school eleven and fifteen, and Norman, though coming on well,

was as yet far below those altitudes. Fred, uplifted by his successes, was not so careful now to conciliate him. He encouraged the worst side of Hugo, and had established an influence over him while Norman had been off the field. This always happened, but now Hugo did not gradually come over to Norman, as he had done before. His adolescence had brought him to Fred's unsavoury views of life and conduct. Fred was his chosen companion at Hayslope, in a way that Norman would never be.

Norman, an attractive, light-hearted boy, in the early years of his school life, was not without experience of evil, to which he had shut his eyes as much as possible. The talk of the two older boys offended and troubled him, but he did not at first combat it. He was parted from them by more than years. Hitherto they had all been boys together; now the other two were essentially men, of the baser sort, and he remained a boy, with a boy's clean distaste for what was as yet none of his business. He fell silent when they pursued their promptings, and presently began to withdraw himself from them.

Pamela had reached the age of nine. She was an engaging little sylph-like creature, with laughing, mischievous ways, and a bright intelligence beyond her years. She was quite fit to be a companion to Norman, and he took pleasure in her society. Judith was only a year younger, and companionable, too, in a more serious way. Alice and Isabelle were five and four. All of them loved Norman, who played childish games with them, and was entirely happy in doing so. But

this brought on him some return of the treatment by which he had been made so unhappy during his first intercourse with Hugo and Fred together. It did not make him unhappy now, but contemptuous of them. Still, there was the fact that Norman's childhood still hung about him, while they had got rid of theirs; and no boy of fifteen likes having his youth emphasized, especially by those, rather older, with whom he desires to be on equal terms. Fred and Hugo held this advantage over him, which delayed the outbreak for some time.

It came suddenly when it did come, and its beginnings were almost a repetition of the quarrel of years before. Norman was wanted to do something with the other two, and was not to be found. They came upon him by chance, with Pamela, in a retired part of the garden. They were sitting on a bench deep in conversation, for they found plenty to talk about that interested them, and Pamela was often very serious in these confabulations, when she laid aside the quick activities of her nature and was content to sit quietly and talk to a friend.

The discovery was made an occasion of whooping triumph by Fred and Hugo, as if they had surprised some secret. Pamela flamed out against them for disturbing her and Norman, and told them to go away and leave them alone. Their interference stung Norman to a cold fury that was quite a new experience to him, and beyond what was natural to his years. He stood up with a white face and confronted Fred, whose eyes flickered for a moment before him. "I'll just go

and get my cap," he said, " and then I'll come with you. Wait for me down by the wood."

So he got Pamela away. She expostulated indignantly as they crossed the lawn together. " I hate Fred Comfrey," she said. " Why do you want to go with him instead of staying with me? "

" Oh, we'd already arranged something. I'd forgotten," he said shortly. " I can't always be with you."

It was beyond him altogether to affect indifference before her, and this unusual brusqueness served its turn. " You're ashamed of them finding you talking to a girl," she said hotly. " You're like that horrid Fred. Very well, then, you needn't pretend to be friends with me any more. Go with him."

" Oh, don't be silly," he said, and left her.

He went through the garden and across the park to where they were waiting for him. As he went he gave reign to his anger. Little Pamela! That coarse brute to jeer at their being together! And Hugo had stood by, grinning, if not even adding jeers of his own. His fist clenched as he walked up to them. " You're a foul swine," he said, stopping short within a yard of Fred, and added more, in language that seemed to come readily to his lips, though as a rule he avoided the grosser forms of schoolboy abuse.

Fred was taken aback for the moment by the violence of the attack, and Norman turned to Hugo. " You're a swine, too," he said. " Fancy letting this filthy cad treat your own sister like that! "

Fred began to say something; Norman did not wait

to hear what. Fred's speech goaded him to action, and he dashed his fist in the other's face. Then they were at it. Fred's anger was loosed, too, and for a few moments it was a desperate scrimmage, with no science shown on either side. Norman, battered by the attack, was the first to gird himself to some self-possession, and by fighting warily delayed the end for a little. But he had no chance whatever against the much stronger and bigger boy, and was soon on the grass with the fight knocked out of him.

He was struggling up to continue it, but Hugo intervened. "This is rot," he said, more decisive than his wont. "Fred was only chaffing. He meant nothing by it."

Norman was gasping and sobbing, the blood dripping from his nose. "He's a swine," he cried, "a filthy swine."

Fred stood over him, breathing hard. Norman had marked him, but not enough to keep his blood hot. Already he was feeling some compunction at having let himself go to the full against a boy of Norman's size. "It was just chaff," he repeated; "nothing to get shirty about."

Norman struggled to his knees and unsteadily to his feet, and with his handkerchief to his face went off into the wood away from them.

Fred and Hugo looked at one another. "Better go after him," Hugo said. "There'll be a row if—"

"No good my going," said Fred sulkily. Dread of what should happen began to take hold of him. "You'd better go. He won't want to sneak."

Hugo caught Norman up. He was standing against a tree, sobbing. "You put up a jolly good fight against him," Hugo said awkwardly. "Better shake hands, now it's all over."

"I shan't," cried Norman passionately. "He's a foul swine."

"Well, you keep on saying that, but I think you're making too much of it. He didn't mean anything beastly about Pam. Naturally, I shouldn't stand that."

"Yes, you would," said Norman, facing him. "You'd stand anything from that beast. You're just like you used to be with him. I'll tell you this—I stood it then, but I'm not going to stand it now. I won't have anything more to do with him, and when you have him here I won't have anything to do with you. You can go and be swines together. I'll play with the children instead. You can say what you like about it. I don't care what you say about it."

He was still somewhat incoherent, but Hugo understood him. "I dare say it was rotten to chaff you about that," he said. "Anyhow, I apologize for it, and I'm sure Fred will. Now you've had a scrap, you ought not to keep it up against him."

Norman turned away. "I'm going down to the river to wash my face," he said. "I don't want *you*."

"Aren't you going to make it up with Fred?"

"No, I'm not. I hate the beast, and I've had enough of him."

"Well, you won't say anything—"

Norman cut him short. "I'm not a cad," he said.

Hugo went back to Fred. The result of their confabulation was that Fred kept away from the hall until Norman's visit was over. Norman did not see him again until years afterwards.

CHAPTER IV

PAMELA

"PAM, I've got something to tell you."

Norman had waited until they were away from the glare of the garden, and the green gloom of the summer woods was all about them, cool and secret and inviting to confidences.

He had not changed much since those days of boyhood, though he was now nearly twenty-five, and the last years of the war had caught him, and taught him some things that he wanted to forget, as well as much that had strengthened the fibre of which he was made. There was a boyish atmosphere about him still. He was tall and slim, and his fair hair, which he tried to keep plastered to his head, was always breaking away from the bounds of its cosmetics and dropping a skein over his forehead. Nothing he had undergone had affected that bright light-hearted charm of his boyhood. He seemed to be rejoicing in his youth and his strength, and in all the world about him, which, in spite of the shadows that still hung over it, he at least found as good as the young men of a generation earlier had found their more untroubled world.

Pamela was very young still, and very pretty. Her hair and her colouring were as fair as Norman's, whom she resembled in a cousinly way. Indeed the resemblances between them were more than superficial. They

had the same eager pleasure in whatever life they found about them. They thought alike in most things to which they put their adventurous minds, and to neither of them did it seem odd that Pamela, who had not long since left the schoolroom, and had grown up under the shadow that had dulled and limited the life of her kind, should claim an equality of opinion with Norman, who was six years older, and knew so much more than the generality of young men had ever known before.

One may pause for a moment to note this unexpected attribute of those whose early years of manhood, instead of being passed in the pursuits and interests, educative or otherwise, adapted to their youth, had been given to the war, of which they had borne the ultimate brunt. The years which divide us from it are passing away. The social phenomena of each successive stage of the long struggle, and those that have succeeded it, too familiar to call for much notice at the time, will become blurred, and half forgotten even by those who were part of them; and in after years they will be difficult to gauge. This, among them, is not likely to be seen as it was, when the years have increased, and later generations try to recapture the spirit of the great war: that the young men, and the older men too, who lived through it, and came out of it whole, or not too broken to make what they would of their lives, put it to all effective purposes out of their minds. While it was going on they did the work appointed to them as if it were no more than any other work proper to their years, and pursued their recreations with an added zest. And when at last they were released, they crowded back into

the various ways of life open to them, and put it all behind them as just an experience like any other which might have come to them. It could never be forgotten, but it was not to come between them and the life to which they had returned; and the interests of that life were exactly what they would have been if it had never happened.

So Norman Eldridge, who would have gone to a university in the ordinary way, but for the war, was at Cambridge now, three years later than his time, and with his three years of service behind him. His enjoyment of undergraduate life was even greater than it would have been in normal times, for it was a more conscious enjoyment, and he could gauge his opportunities better. Games, in which he excelled, though he had not quite succeeded in gaining his hoped-for Blue for cricket, did not take up even the greater part of his attention. He was a lover of the arts, and found Cambridge a delectable place in which to pursue them. He had plenty of money at his disposal, and social life was open to him at its widest. When term-time was over he could go where he liked, and enjoy himself as he pleased. And at this time he was enjoying himself to the full.

"Pam, I've got something to tell you," he said as they went down into the wood together.

"Is it the real thing this time?" she asked, with a quick smiling glance at his face.

"Oh, none of the others have been anything—just fancies—boyish fancies, you know."

He laughed gaily. He was very good to look at,

with his close-cropped shapely head thrown back on the firm column of his neck. Pam smiled up at him again, with a sort of proprietary fondness. She admired him, as she had always admired him ever since she could remember, and had never met a young man whom she thought his equal. And it was a source of pride to her that he was one of her own family—to all intents and purposes a brother. Poor Hugo, over whose death she had cried, as something strange and unexpected and infinitely pathetic, had been a kind brother to her —she liked to remember that the last time she had said good-bye to him, never to see him again, he had given her ten pounds to spend as she liked—but he had never made a confidante of her, as Norman had always done. She had known very little of Hugo's life as it was spent away from Hayslope, but she thought she knew all about Norman's life. He had fallen in love once or twice, and had always told her everything about it. Hugo seemed to have gone through life without falling in love. Poor Hugo! She could not but believe, from her intimate talks with Norman, that he had died without acquiring the crown of his manhood. Norman was attractive under the influence of his love affairs, and she was not surprised that he had them continually, though she saw quite plainly that without some such guidance as she was fortunately able to give him he might have got into trouble with them. Men were so foolish where girls were concerned. Even the best of them, who had a lot to give—like Norman—fell in love with girls who were in no way their equals. But it never did to tell them so. Give them all sympathy and affec-

tion, and the affair died away of itself. So it had been three times with Norman already, and Pamela, who had been a little alarmed over the first affair, was confirmed in the belief that she had dealt most wisely with each situation as it had arisen. Still, the genuine lasting emotion must come into play sooner or later. There must be, somewhere, a girl who was worthy of such a rare prize as Norman's love, and Pamela had always told herself that when that girl was found she would welcome her whole-heartedly.

"Yes, you've been in love with love," she said impressively; and they both laughed, for this was a quotation.

"Trying my wings," said Norman. "They were all dears, but there wasn't enough *to* them when it came down to the things one is interested in."

"Well, now I'm free to speak," said Pamela, "I'll confess that they seemed to me a set of brainless idiots. I hope the new one has got *some* intelligence. It would be such an advantage if you had to spend your life with her. She's pretty, of course. Have you got a photograph of her?"

"Not a proper one. I'm not up to that point yet."

"Worshipping at a distance?"

"No, not exactly. We've danced together a lot in London, and been the greatest pals. Really, I've been rather clever about it. She's very young—only in her first season. She's out to have a jolly good time, but her life isn't only amusement. She's slogging hard at the piano. She'd like to be a pro, but of course her people won't let her."

"Why not?"

"Oh, well, her father's a Duke. She's Lady Margaret Joliffe. I dare say you've seen pictures of her in the papers. But they don't do her justice. She's perfectly lovely. Oh, I've got it terrible bad this time, Pam."

"Yes, I've seen her pictures. She's very pretty indeed," said Pam. "And Jim knows her. He says she's very clever."

The time seemed to have come at last, then. If Norman succeeded in winning a girl like this, nobody could say he was not getting as good as he gave, not even Pam, who thought that hardly anybody would be good enough for him. Yet she did not experience the quick sense of pleasure which she had persuaded herself would be her response whenever Norman did come to announce the real thing.

"Oh, clever!" repeated Norman. "That's not the word for her. She *knows*. She's got extraordinary perceptions for a girl of her age. It isn't only music. It's books, and art—everything that's jolly and interesting. And she's such fun with it all. No more of a highbrow than you are. In fact, she's the only girl I've ever met who sees things in the way that you do."

Pamela did feel some pleasure at this. "That's topping," she said. "Of course prettiness isn't everything. I suppose the others were pretty, except the girl with a squint; but they—"

"Oh, come now, Pam, she hadn't got a squint. She—"

"Well, a slight cast in the eye, then; and some people

think it an added beauty. But they all seemed to have the brains of rabbits. I was beginning to think that you never *would* fall in love with anybody that had got beyond Short Division. Of course I'm glad you've found somebody intelligent at last. But do you mean to say that you never got beyond talking about Flaubert and Ravel and Augustus John with her?"

Norman looked at her with a slightly pained expression. "Pam dear!" he expostulated. "Why this acidulation?"

Pamela laughed, and they began again. "Well, it's really rather exciting," she said. "Do tell me about it, Norman. You haven't told me anything yet. When did you catch fire?"

His face took on a beatific expression. "Well, I'd held off just a trifle," he said. "We'd had a topping time together here and there. She always seemed to be pleased to see me, but—well, there was generally the old Duchess somewhere in the background; she's not really old, of course, but— You see, it seemed to be flying a bit high for me. I was at school with Cardiff —her brother—and he was in the Regiment too for a bit."

"Whose brother? The Duchess's?"

"No. Margaret's."

"Do you call her Margaret?"

"Well, I was going to tell you. I lunched with them at the Harrow match. Duchess rather cordial. Duke ditto. He used to be a bit of a cricketer, and he knew I'd got my Eleven at Eton. I was feeling a bit bucked with myself—seemed to be getting a sort of domestic

hold, you know. So I plumped myself down beside her, without being invited to do so, and she didn't turn me away. I made her laugh. I believe I made them all laugh at our end of the table. I was feeling good and happy, you know, and rather let myself go. So after lunch I asked her to perambulate with me; and we perambulated. I don't think it was quite in the bargain. I could amuse them as a bright young lad, while they were stuffing, but I mustn't take liberties. She gave a sort of quick look at the old Dutch, and said: 'Yes, come along; we'll run away.' The old Dutch caught us with her eye as we were twinkling off, and called out, 'Margaret!' But Margaret wasn't taking any, so we had a very pleasant half-hour together, and she gave me most of her dates."

"Most of her dates!"

"Oh, we weren't eating 'em out of a paper bag. I found out most of the places she was going to when they left London. I don't anticipate an invitation to Balmoral, or anything of that sort; but Goodwood's open to everybody, and there are one or two houses in Scotland I think I can wangle myself into later on, and there's a chance of her going to the Canterbury cricket week. If she does, Norman Eldridge will also take part in that festival. Oh, it's not over yet, by any means. By the time I have to resume my studies at Cambridge University, I hope—"

"Yes, but what about—?"

"Wait a minute. You're in such a hurry. I took her back to the Dukeries. They were in a box, and fortunately Cardiff was there. He'd been off on a

little line of his own at lunch, and I hadn't seen him for some time. His welcome was obstreperous. He was feeling good and happy himself, owing to his own particular fairy smiling on him, I suppose. He'd brought her with him. She was some peach."

"Oh, never mind about her. Stick to the point."

"I did. I took advantage of the genial atmosphere, and brought the old Dutch into it. She didn't want to laugh at first, but I made her. I wanted to remove the impression that I was a sort of snatch-lady pirate, but only wanted to play with them all together. I could tell the point where I succeeded. Soon kind of unhitched herself generally, and—"

"Oh, do come to the point, Norman. You're getting as long-winded as one of the old almshouse women. When did you call Margaret Margaret? That's the important thing."

"Yes, I know it is. It was a thrill, Pam. I didn't do it as if I'd done it by accident. I did it loud and bold—at least, not loud; I thought it would try the old Dutch too much. But it was all quite simple. When we said good-bye, I looked at her straight, and said: 'Good-bye, Margaret.'"

"I think it *was* rather bold—if not crude."

"No, dear; not crude. Not crude at all. I put a world of meaning into it—the auld hackneyed phrase, which may mean so little and may mean so much."

Pamela laughed. "I don't believe you're in love with her at all, if you can make fun of it," she said.

"How little you know, Pam! I jest to hide my emotions. I've fed on that sweet moment ever since."

"You've told me of other moments rather like it. I suppose her eyes dropped before yours."

"They did not. That's where she's different from all other girls—except you."

"Thanks awfully, Norman. I'll try and keep my eyes from dropping if it ever happens to me. But from what you've said before I thought they ought to drop. What did she do then—or say?"

"She looked at me straight, and said: 'Good-bye, Norman,' with a little half smile."

Pamela considered this. "That was the end, then," she said.

"Yes, but what an end, Pam! It was the beginning too. You can see what a thrill it was, can't you?"

"Yes, I think I can," she said slowly.

"Mind you, this was the very first time. Up to then there hadn't been a word or a sign. That's what makes it something to remember, you know. Oh, Pam! It's a heavenly feeling being in love. And it's such a score having somebody like you to tell it to. I don't know who I should have told if I hadn't had you—my tailor, I dare say; I shouldn't have been able to keep it to myself, and I owe him something which it isn't quite convenient to pay just yet. I told her about you, you know."

"Did you?"

"Oh, yes. I always do talk about you when I get really confidential."

"What did you tell her? And what did she say?"

"She was very sweet about you, and said you were

just the sort of girl she would like to have for a friend. A lot of her friends were such ninnies."

"I never meet that sort of girl now," said Pamela with a sigh. "If only I hadn't had flu when Auntie Eleanor asked me to stay with you in London, I suppose I should have met her."

"Yes, that was jolly bad luck. We should all three have had a jolly good time together."

Pamela laughed again. "Perhaps I should have had somebody of my own," she said. "I'm old enough now, you know, Norman."

"Of course you are. You're just the same age as Margaret, as a matter of fact. You'd have had 'em swarming. But there are precious few of them I should think good enough for you. I say, old girl, what about Jim Horsham?"

"Well, what about him?"

"I don't think *he's* good enough, you know, though he *is* a Viscount."

"I like Jim. I've known him all my life."

"He's a good chap, but he's a desperate dull dog. Don't go falling in love with Jim, Pam."

"I'm not likely to fall in love with him."

"It occurred to me this afternoon that he showed some slight inclination to fall in love with you. There was a sort of concentrated heaviness on him whenever he was with you. I suppose he'd sparkle if he could, under emotion, but as he can't, he's got to be duller than usual. Perhaps there's nothing in it. But I shouldn't blame him if he did fall in love with you. In fact, I should think it rather cheek, in a way, if he didn't.

He's not likely to meet anybody more worth falling in love with. But it isn't good enough, Pam."

"Well, I shouldn't worry about it, if I were you. Jim isn't my ideal, though he's a nice old thing, and I think you're too superior about him altogether. Did you know Fred Comfrey had come home?"

"Fred Comfrey!" Norman frowned. "I shouldn't think you're likely to fall in love with *him*," he said.

"Oh, bother falling in love! I'm leaving that to you at present. But there aren't many people to play with about here just now. He makes another one. He's much improved."

"Oh, Pam, he's an awful creature. Surely, you're not going to have anything to do with him!"

"I used to hate him; but he's quite different now. I should never have known him. You know he went out to China, before you came to live here, and he never came home until he joined up for the war. He did very well in the war—got his Commission quite soon, and the Military Cross. He was badly wounded too, and isn't fit yet. I'm sorry for him; and really, Norman, he's quite nice. Anyhow, we couldn't *not* have him to play with us, because of Mr. and Mrs. Comfrey. I expect Auntie Eleanor will ask him here too. He only came yesterday."

"Well, I suppose you've got to give everybody his chance. He was an unmitigated beast as a boy, but perhaps he's improved. He couldn't very well have got any worse. Still, it does rather stick in my gizzard that he should be making friends with you, as I suppose he'll want to. I should be a bit cautious if I were you,

Pam. After all, one does know something of what a man is, when one has known him as a boy. I should say that Mr. Fred Comfrey was a nasty specimen, even if he has succeeded in disguising it, as he used not to. How long is he staying here?"

"I think he may stay in England altogether. He has done very well in business in China, and thinks he may be able to carry on in London."

"I wish he'd stayed in China. But how long is he staying in Hayslope?"

"For some time, I think. He had to go back to China, directly he was demobbed, and hasn't had a holiday since the war. You ought to be nice to him, Norman. Poor Hugo liked him. He talked to me very nicely about Hugo this morning."

"When did you see him?"

"After church. Mother asked him to lunch, but he thought he'd better go home."

"He wasn't at all a good friend for Hugo, you know."

"Perhaps not; but that's so long ago. Hugo improved too, afterwards."

Norman acquiesced perfunctorily. He knew that Hugo had not at all improved, afterwards, but also that Pamela didn't. "Well, I'll try to forget what he used to be like," he said. "But don't let's talk about him any more. Let's talk about Margaret."

CHAPTER V

THE FAMILY

Colonel Eldridge rode into his stable-yard and delivered up his horse to Timbs, who came hobbling out to receive it with a cheerful morning air and a general appearance of satisfaction with himself and his circumtances. Yet there were those who would have said that Timbs had no particular reason to be pleased with the way things had gone for him.

He had come to Hayslope Hall as groom ten years before, and had succeeded the old coachman four years later. He might have considered himself lucky then, for he was only twenty-six years of age. He had half a dozen horses in his stables and two grooms under him. There was also a chauffeur for the big car and the little runabout. Timbs had a young wife and a new baby, and comfortable quarters in which to keep them. In fact there seemed nothing left for him to desire, unless it was another baby of a sex complementary to the first one.

Then the war came. Timbs joined up among the first, and was turned into a good soldier, always cheerful and reliable, and diligent in writing home to the young wife who was being taken care of at Hayslope. Colonel Eldridge, who had gone back to soldiering himself, had exercised pressure, where it was required, as it was not in the case of Timbs, upon the able-

bodied men on his estate to join the army, but had done his utmost to ensure their leaving their homes free of anxiety to those dependent upon them. So Mrs. Timbs and the baby prospered, while Timbs fought for his country; but Mrs. Timbs always wished that the war would end and Timbs would come home again, in which she differed from many wives in similar circumstances.

Timbs did come home at last, and she did not have to wait for him until quite the end. His left leg was shattered, and he had been for a long time in a hospital before she was allowed to have him. About the time the armistice was signed he was ready for work again. But it was not in his master's power to give him the work he had done before the war. Hayslope Hall could no longer support a coachman, two or three grooms and a chauffeur. Timbs took the place of all of them. One horse was kept and both the cars, but the bigger one was seldom used because of the price of petrol and tires. Timbs turned himself into an efficient chauffeur, and liked the change in his duties. He had higher wages than before, but perhaps not quite so high as he could have got elsewhere if he hadn't preferred to stick to his old master. His quarters were the same, his wife was as devoted to him as ever, and his baby had grown into a pretty little girl of seven, who was the apple of his eye, and made a pet of by the young ladies. Timbs thought himself well off, even with his crooked leg; and perhaps he was, as things go nowadays.

Timbs knew when the Colonel was in the mood for a little chat, and when it was wise to render quick serv-

ice with a silent tongue. In the good old days the Colonel had seldom come in from his morning ride without a cheery word or two to this favourite servant of his. He loved his horses and found plenty to say about them, though most of it might have been said many times before. And he would have something to say to Timbs about what he might have seen in the course of his inspection of farms and fields, which he liked to undertake before breakfast in the summer. In the autumn there were early starts for cubbing, and then of course there was plenty to talk about on the return.

The good days did not seem to have disappeared entirely when the war was over, though Hugo's death had made him more silent than before, and the reduction in stables and outdoor upkeep generally had already begun. But there was a season's hunting, and Pamela had made her first appearance in the field. Timbs, with one groom to help him, had been kept busy enough, but his first winter at home had seemed to him very good. This was what the Colonel and he had always looked forward to—the time when the young ladies would hunt regularly, one after the other. Miss Pamela was good company for her father. He would soon pick up his spirits, and everything would be as it had been again.

But by the next season the economies had increased. There was no more hunting from Hayslope Hall. The Colonel kept one horse to get about on, and there was an old pony for pottering work on the place, which the younger children sometimes rode. That was what

the war had brought to Colonel Eldridge in return for his services, which had included a year in the field, and after that four years of routine work in various provincial centres of industry. As a soldier he made no complaints. At his age he expected no reward other than the conviction of having done his duty where he could be made most useful. As a landowner he had many complaints to make, but kept them mostly to himself. He had passed for a rich man before the war; now he was a poor one. But one did not flaunt one's poverty before the world. That was why he had dropped hunting altogether; his old Caesar would have carried him well enough for a day or so a week, if he had cared to go on.

The morning chats with Timbs were getting rarer. There would certainly be none this morning. After a look at his master's face Timbs led Caesar away without a word, and the Colonel went into the house. Something happened to put him out. Timbs's own face was overcast, and it was fully two minutes before he began to whistle at his work.

It was a quarter past eight. Breakfast was at half-past, and as Colonel Eldridge would ride no more that day, he went upstairs to change his clothes. He came down as the gong sounded, and his expression had somewhat cleared. He held strong opinions about keeping an even temper before his family.

An English family assembled for breakfast in an old-established country house—the nations of the earth may be invited to contemplation of it. Here at Hayslope Hall was an example that could have been multi-

plied by thousands at that hour, or at one a little later; for as a nation we are not early risers except on compulsion.

The room was large, but not too large for an air of domesticity when there was only the family to use it. It had three long small-paned windows, which on this summer morning were open to the wide, yet secluded garden. The walls were hung with pictures, some good, some indifferent, and all so familiar that they were never looked at. Of the portraits none were older than the middle of the eighteenth century; but five or six generations of men and women of the same blood who have lived in the same house, and, allowing for differences of era, in much the same way, is already something substantial in the way of background. The furniture was not more than about a hundred years old, of that period of solid and dignified ugliness which was yet so much more satisfactory than the fashions succeeding it that by contrast with them it is now beginning to acquire merit. How it had come to replace the eighteenth century furniture which the periwigged gentlemen and hooped ladies on the walls had used when in the flesh was now forgotten; but it is only of late years that old furniture has been preferred to new, and there was nothing remarkable in this. The refurnishing of the dining-room might very well have been set in hand again since the last clearing out a hundred years before if it had not been thought that it would do very well as it was, and that there were more important rooms to spend money on, if money was to be spent in this way. As

a setting for the family that now used it the room was eloquent of an ancestry already respectably established, and it told somehow of interests that were not markedly concerned with the decorations and appointments of a house. To the Eldridges, their dining-room was the place for the enjoyment of food and the sociability that went therewith, and it fulfilled all purposes that could be required of it. It was only in the matter of large assemblies, of which the great expanse of dark mahogany and the score or so of well-padded chairs seemed to make perpetual suggestion, that any incongruity might have been felt. The time for that was not now. But with the table lessened to the needs of family use and the space around it thus agreeably increased, the normal occupation of the room was sufficient for it. Here began the day with the assembling of those who would go their ways, some together and some apart, throughout its course, but all with a sense of the nearness of the rest; and here they would meet twice again before the day was done, to keep alive one of the best of the good things that English country life has cherished and made complete—the community of the family.

Colonel Eldridge, after greeting his daughters with a mixture of formality and affection, occupied himself with his breakfast and the letters which lay in a little pile beside his plate. It had not been his habit to deal thus with his correspondence in the days before the war. He had been more ready to talk then. He would choose a few letters out of the pile and perhaps discuss them, as Mrs. Eldridge did with hers at the other end

of the table, and leave the rest for afterwards. Now he went through them all, business letters as well as private, and, schooled as he was to hide his emotions, he could not always keep from his face some expression of annoyance, or even dismay. But it was only in his face that this showed, and his wife and daughters knew that it was not meant to show at all. By degrees they had learnt to ignore it. If they addressed him he would always respond, and he would have been annoyed if they had tried to suit themselves to his moods. He liked to hear them chattering gaily among themselves, though he was not always ready to join in their chatter. They were, indeed, the reward that all his anxieties and schemings brought him. It was the happiness and freedom of their lives in the home which it behooved him to keep intact about them that sweetened it to him. But for them there would have been no anxiety, but only some reduction of opportunities which would still have left the main interests of his life untouched.

Colonel Eldridge was very neat in his suit of grey tweed, well-cut, well-brushed, but well-worn, his white stock creaseless, his figure thin and a little stiff, but not with the stiffness of age, his gold-rimmed glasses on the ridge of his thin, straight nose, his well-shaped nervous hands manipulating his papers or the implements of his meal. He was as different as possible, in outward appearance, from those ancestors of his whose pictures hung upon the walls; but probably he was very like them at root. Certainly there was not one who had been more attached to the house and acres which

had been theirs and were now his. He had been a good soldier, of a limited kind, but he was above all a country gentleman, and looked thoroughly in his place in this room, which could only have been found, just as it was, in an English country house.

Mrs. Eldridge also looked thoroughly in place behind the old silver and china of her equipage. She always came down to breakfast in a state of apparent content with herself and her surroundings, cool and unruffled both in dress and demeanour. In the time that was past there had been so much to look forward to in the day of which this gathering was the inauguration. Though not, presumably, attached to the life of the country by the same ties as bound her husband, and enjoying her life equally when the periodic moves were made to London, she would have chosen the country rather than the town for permanent residence. The choice had not been hers, but it had had to be made. Much had gone that had made life agreeable to her at Hayslope, but much remained. On these summer mornings it was not so unlike what it had always been to her. There was the pleasant meal with her husband and her children, whom she loved; the appointments of the table, in which she never failed to take pleasure, though she had used them regularly for over twenty years; the sense of being newly and becomingly dressed; the birds singing in the garden, which was so fresh and inviting, and with the windows open so much a part, as it were, of the room itself. Her letters never brought her worries, as her husband's sometimes brought him—only occasionally a mild regret for op-

portunities of which she could no longer take advantage. But at this time of the day she was not much inclined to want more than she had. Her domestic duties were immediately in front of her, and she enjoyed them. She enjoyed them even more than before, for with fewer servants more depended on her. Only half of her desired the distractions due to wealth; the rest of her was pure domesticity. She had never been happier than during the first few years of married life, before her husband had succeeded his father as Squire of Hayslope. She was happy now in much the same responsibilities as had then devolved upon her, had she but known it. In these early hours of the day the consciousness of what she had lost did not trouble her. Besides, something might always happen in the long hours before her. She was not so old as to have lost that sense of the unexpected.

Pamela was happy too. She might grumble sometimes—to Norman—about the restrictions that had come to spoil the life of Hayslope Hall; but she loved it. And all the future was before her, golden and glamorous. It wrapped her in a sort of happy aura, which contained no definite point of desire. Anything might happen to her, in any one of these summer days, which began with the family meeting at breakfast. Something was bound to happen some day, and in the meantime life was sweet, and the shadow that had come to lie over her home hardly darkened at all the radiance in which she walked.

Judith was as pretty as Pamela in her way, which was an entirely different way. She was the only dark

member of the family, now that Hugo was dead. Some forgotten ancestress had bequeathed her her lustrous hair, of which the shadows were almost visibly blue, and her large, deep, solemn eyes. Her very skin was dark, but with the bloom of youth on it, and the healthy blood that flowed beneath its soft surface, it was rich and delicate. At the age of eighteen she had not yet come into the full heritage of her beauty, which did not depend so much as Pamela's upon youth. She hardly even seemed aware of it, and clothes were not yet a matter of much interest to her. She had alternations of childish high spirits and brooding reflection. Out of doors she was still something of a tomboy, in her young and restless energy; but she would sit for hours over a book, and in those moods she was oblivious to everybody and everything around her. She seldom talked about what she read, and indeed her reading would have been a puzzle to anyone who had tried to draw inferences of literary taste from it. Pamela had once reported to Norman the books over which Judith had spent hours of a wet day. They were Grimm's Fairy Tales, "The Wide, Wide World," and Bacon's Essays, and she seemed to have spent about the same time over each. Pamela held that she had no literary taste whatever; Norman was inclined to treat her preferences as a touchstone of merit. If Judith liked something, it was probably good. This theory was strengthened when she said she liked a picture of Gaugin's, of which he submitted to her a reproduction, and weakened by her absorption in Martin Tupper's "Proverbial Philosophy," which she had found in the

library and carried up to her room with her. She was quite ready to laugh with them over her tastes, but she would never give any explanation of them. "I like it," or "I don't like it," was her sole contribution to literary criticism, and she would never be moved a hair's breadth by any consensus of opinion. Judith went her own way in everything, but her way at present was confined almost entirely to Hayslope, where she found everything that she wanted. Less than Pamela did she feel the loss of what had made the life of her home rich in interest before the war. She had grown up from childhood under the new conditions and was happy in them.

The exceptional family beauty seemed to have stopped short at Judith. Alice and Isabelle, who were thirteen and twelve, respectively, had their abundant fair hair to recommend them, and their active youth, but nothing much else as yet in the way of looks. They were agreeable children, much alike in their eager interest in whatever went on around them, and their unerring pursuit of pleasure. They were always "the children" to the rest of the family, and what they thought was of small importance, though what they did sometimes obtruded itself upon their elders. Sitting at breakfast, one on either side of their mother, in their neat clothes, which would not be so neat later on in the day, their thick manes confined in heavy plaits, they seemed eminently *good* children, showing a healthy appetite, but no greediness, in the consumption of viands, taking a bright part in the conversation when it touched their orbit, but not obtruding themselves in

such a way as to make their company noxious. Their presence at the breakfast table seemed, indeed, to heighten the effect of a family at one and at peace; for young children in a happy home have no desires outside it. Their parents, their brothers and sisters, even the servants and dependants who are also part of the family for the time being, are the chief characters in their little world. Not even their parents themselves are so bounded in their interests by the home they have made for them. And the wonderful imagination of children makes it the chief place of delight to them, even where its opportunities are small. Opportunities were not small at Hayslope Hall for these two, and they were as happy as children of their age could very well be.

If Miss Baldwin, their governess, was not completely happy—as what woman living always in other people's houses can be?—she was as contented as the accidents of her lot in life could make her. She was a precise spinster of middle age, and sat very prim and mindful of her manners between Pamela and Alice, never speaking unless when spoken to, but then speaking with an attention to the composition of sentences and the correct enunciation of her vowels which was a lesson to everybody present, and intended to be so to at least two of them. Colonel Eldridge addressed her directly, at least once in the course of every meal at which she was present, out of politeness. Mrs. Eldridge always found it difficult to remember that she was there, but also addressed her occasionally; but her attention was apt to wander over the reply.

Miss Baldwin had been at Hayslope for two years, but was no nearer to making one of the family circle than when she arrived. She was strict in the schoolroom and a good teacher in a limited way, but without any real interest in the subjects which she taught. Nobody would have thought, from her appearance and manner, that she was an incurable sentimentalist. She lived in a world of her own—a world of romance, of which the materials were sent her once a week in official-looking long envelopes with a typewritten address. Her time came when the children were in bed, and the life of the house, in which she had no wish to take part, was concentrated below. Then, in the large quiet schoolroom, sitting by the open window in the summer, or in winter time by the fire, she would be wafted away from the actual life about her, with all its restrictions for one of her age and class, to live richly and freely with the heroes and heroines of her chosen world. Baldness of narrative troubled her not at all. In the novels by authors of repute which she sometimes heard people discussing, there seemed no room for the play of imagination; the novelist would have it just so and not otherwise, and the characters to which he introduced his readers were so much like the characters one might meet at any time in the dull and sterile flesh. Those strong heroes of her favourite romances were as gods beside the emasculate earth-dwellers who stood for hero even in the best of stories bound between boards; the very virtue of their titles, if titles they had, seemed to be denied them. Nor did the heroines please her any better. She could never imagine herself one of them

with any pleasure. If stately, they were never stately enough; if blushing and timid, they were merely passed by as of no account. Even Ouida, for whom she made an exception, having read some of her novels in early life, under a strong sense of immodesty, concerned herself with unessentials. Miss Baldwin wanted no pages of description, however poetic. She could get that in Wordsworth, duly annotated, so that there should be no mistake as to locality. If it was question of a garden in which a love scene was to be enacted, she only wanted to imagine it for herself—the most beautiful garden that ever was, not without indications of wealth on the part of its owners; or if a cottage garden, the mere mention of roses and honeysuckle would suffice. It was the people who mattered and what happened to them, and with them she smiled and wept, and felt, to the depths of her being.

So perhaps Miss Baldwin was happy after all, if not in the circumstances of her daily life, which she went through conscientiously and efficiently, in that paradise the gates of which were always open to her, where men were as gods, and women were worshipped by them, and none of them ever behaved in the way that Miss Baldwin was always impressing upon her pupils was the only possible way to behave.

CHAPTER VI

BARTON'S CLOSE

Such was the family party that sat round the breakfast table at Hayslope Hall on that summer morning. Colonel Eldridge was the only member of it upon whom a weight seemed to lie, and his disturbance of mind was guessed at by nobody but his wife, who threw occasional exploratory and sympathetic glances at him, but made no particular effort to lighten his mood, unless by being more than usually responsive to the chatter of the girls. Whatever it was that was troubling him, she would hear of it after breakfast, when she always went to his room with him before setting herself to the occupations that would keep them apart for the rest of the morning.

She was a trifle apprehensive as to whether she herself might not have given him cause for displeasure. He had refused to dine at Pershore Castle two nights before, but she and Pamela had gone, and he had not objected to that. What he might possibly object to, however, was the invitation she had given to young Lord Horsham to lunch at Hayslope that very day. She had not told him yet that she had done so, for her reason for asking the young man had been quite clearly defined in her own mind, and she did not want him to guess at it. Perhaps Pamela had told him that

Horsham was coming, he had guessed why, and was displeased about it.

But no! She knew before breakfast was over that that was not the cause of his mood.

Pamela said: "Jim is coming to lunch and I suppose he will want to play tennis afterwards. We'd better mow the lawn, Judy, and mark out the court again."

Colonel Eldridge frowned, and Mrs. Eldridge's spirit drooped, but rose again when he said: "It isn't your business to mow lawns. That's one of the things that Perkins ought to see to."

Poor dear man, he hated the idea of his daughters doing work that had always been done as a matter of course by servants. He was sore about all the things that they ought to have had and he could no longer give them, even when they were things that made no difference to them whatever.

"Oh, we like doing it, Daddy," said Pamela. "It makes us feel that we've earned our games on it. Don't deprive us of the rewards of virtue."

He left the subject. "You'd better ask Fred Comfrey to lunch, if Horsham is coming," he said. "You'll want a four, and I shan't be able to play this afternoon."

So it was settled, to Mrs. Eldridge's relief. It was the first time that Horsham had been asked to Hayslope Hall since the disturbance in which he had been concerned, and her husband had made no comment on it. It was not that that was troubling him.

Nevertheless, she made first mention of it when they went into his room together. "I'm glad you don't

mind Jim coming here," she said. "I forgot to tell you that I'd asked him."

"Mind him! Oh, no, I don't mind him. It wasn't he who behaved in any way that I could be annoyed over. And as for the Crowboroughs, I shan't keep it up against them any longer. I couldn't bring myself to go over there on Monday, but I'm glad you and Pamela went. We must get them over here some time. Cynthia, I'm extremely annoyed at something I've seen this morning."

"Yes, dear? What is it?"

She sat herself down by the window, while he stood by his writing table, or moved between it and the fireplace, while he unburdened himself.

"William talked to me on Sunday about making an addition to his garden—a big addition, taking in a grazing meadow of four acres; Barton's Close, it's called—at the bottom of the wood."

"Yes, dear, I know it, and William and Eleanor told me about it. You don't object, do you?"

"Object! It means cutting up pasture, and he has no right to do that without my permission; no right whatever. It isn't a thing that ought to be done in these days. Besides, his garden is out and away too big as it is. This addition would make it double the size of our garden. It's quite unreasonable. The house isn't his. I let it to him as a country cottage, and never thought of it being turned into a large country house wanting a great deal of money to keep it up. I talked to him about all that on Sunday, and thought he understood. Certainly I didn't consent to cutting up Barton's Close,

and he must have known I didn't. But I happened to go down there this morning, and they are already at work —his own gardeners and half a dozen labourers besides. Really, it's too bad. From what Coombe told me, it was all settled last week—design and everything, and the labour arranged for. So it was a mere pretence asking for my permission at all. I didn't give it; yet he goes straight away and puts the work in hand."

"Did you say definitely that you wouldn't consent?" Mrs. Eldridge asked. She was rather taken aback. She knew all about those garden plans, and had even made suggestions of her own about them. William had mentioned once the necessity of asking a landlord's permission to cut up pasture, but it had been taken for granted that there would be no difficulty about that. She was not quite sure that she had not said herself that there would be no difficulty about that. Certainly it had never crossed her mind that there would be.

"I objected," said her husband decisively. "Possibly I didn't say in so many words: 'No, you can't do it.' I shouldn't say that to William. I pointed out to him plainly why it was inadvisable, and he seemed to understand."

"Is it very important, Edmund? There's plenty of pasture about there, isn't there?"

"I don't know that there's more than can be made use of. But that wasn't the chief point. It's the enlarging and enlarging at the Grange that has become objectionable. It has gone beyond all reasonable grounds already. All very well, as long as William is

there, and treats it as a toy on which to spend his money. But if anything happens, it will be a white elephant—a big house with no land to it, which nobody else is likely to want, and no longer any good as a second house on the place, which it has always been before. *You* and the girls couldn't live there if anything happened to me."

"I never thought of that," she said slowly. "I don't want to think of it either. Of course William has become very lavish; but he is so rich now that I suppose it doesn't matter. And it *is* different, isn't it, dear, now that poor Hugo is dead?"

"Oh, that's what he kept driving in on me. He'll come after me here. I'm not likely to forget it. Still, the place *is* mine, as long as I'm alive, and I'm not going to hand over the reins to William. He's no *right* to act in that way, as if I counted for nothing."

"No," she said; "it's unfortunate. What are you going to do? I suppose you didn't tell Coombe to stop the work?"

"No; I shouldn't put an affront upon William before his servants. Seems to me he's no objection to putting an affront upon me. Coombe knew well enough that I hadn't been consulted, and that I ought to have been. I don't like that fellow Coombe. He may be a very good head-gardener, but he doesn't come from these parts, and he doesn't seem to realize how things are. He's respectful enough in manner, but he was giving me to understand all the time that his master was a much bigger man than I was, and he wished I'd clear out and leave him to go on with his

work. At one point I really did think of ordering him to knock it off. I *could* have done it, and I think he'd have been rather surprised if I had."

"I'm glad you didn't. It's tiresome, of course; but we don't want to quarrel with the Williams, do we? You're not going to tell him to stop it, are you?"

"Oh, I suppose I shall have to swallow it. William is such a much bigger man than I am now. He's made a lot of money, and they've knighted him. I dare say they'll give him a peerage, if he makes much more. *I* can't stand out against him. I'm only an old dug-out of a soldier, and don't matter."

"Well, dear, you're Squire of Hayslope, which counts for something. As for me, I'd rather be Mrs. Eldridge of Hayslope Hall than Lady Eldridge of Hayslope Grange. I don't mean I'd rather be me than Eleanor, though of course I would. But *she* isn't spoilt by all their money, and I certainly don't want to quarrel with her."

"Oh, quarrel! I don't want to quarrel with William, either. We've been good friends all our lives, and nobody's more pleased with his success than I am. Still, what I feel, and feel strongly, is that he ought not to make his success an excuse for changing his attitude towards me. I'm his elder brother, and he has always treated me so until lately. He'd never have thought of doing a thing like this a few years ago, and he wants telling so. Then I dare say we shall get on as we ought to. This has got to be the last of it. Anything further I *shall* veto. The Grange is mine as

well as the Hall. When I'm dead he can do what he likes with both of them. Until then he must be content with what he has."

"Oh, I think he will be. And he's sure to see your point, if you put it to him without irritation. Of course you *are* irritated, dear, and it's only natural. I should be myself, though I'm not an irritable person. I flatter myself that I can see below the surface of things, and I'm sure William is really devoted to you, and looks up to you. He wouldn't want to do anything to displease you, and Eleanor would be horrified at the very idea. Eleanor is very level-headed. I have a great admiration for her, and I'm not a woman who gives her admiration to everybody. Just say something to William when they come down again, and I'll say something to Eleanor: and I'm sure everything will be all right for the future."

"They are not coming down this week; and I have something else to write to William about. I shall write about this too, and if he takes what I say in the right spirit I shan't mention it again."

Mrs. Eldridge rose. "Oh, I'm sure he will," she said, "especially if you don't show irritation, dear. It's always a mistake to show irritation. Now I must go and see about things. Lunch at half-past one. That will give us a nice long morning."

She kissed him, as she always did, and went out. He had already lost some of the irritation which she had so deprecated. If he had sat down and written to his brother without further reflection, he would probably

have made a mild protest against the gardening scheme and at the most reminded him of certain arguments that he had used to him already. But his pen never got started very easily. He had to think over the best way of putting the business affair upon which he had meant to write, and when that was decided his mind went back to the other question, and his anger rose again at the way in which he had been treated. When he did sit down to his table, it was with a face as dark as he had worn on riding into the stable-yard an hour before, and he embarked upon his protest at once.

"Dear William:—I was much annoyed this morning, and I must say surprised too, to find that you had disregarded my wishes in the matter of Barton's Close, and that there is a small army of men there already, cutting it up. I don't want to go again into the reasons I gave you on Sunday for my objection to turning the greater part of your holding into an extravagant pleasure garden. They seem to me to be eminently sound, and I do not remember your bringing any counter-arguments that would affect them. What you have done is simply to ignore them, and treat me on my own property as if my undoubted rights in a matter of this sort could be set aside with not even so much as a word of warning. I must say now at least, that this sort of treatment must stop. However superior your standing may be in the world outside, here at Hayslope I am on my own ground, and you ought to show respect to my position, as until lately you always have done."

A pause came to the rapid scratching of the pen, and Colonel Eldridge looked up towards the garden outside, so quiet and green and happy, with the whirr of the mowing-machine already to be heard where the girls were busy with the lawn, and their young voices coming to him between their bursts of energy. His face had cleared. He had written a straightforward protest, without any beating about the bush. There was no need to say more, though more might very well have been said. In days gone by William had treated him with the respect due from a younger brother to the head of the family. There had been affection between them from their early childhood, but the elder brother had been the leading spirit, as was only right, and when it had been necessary to rebuke the younger he had done it in much the same way as this. William had accepted the rebuke and they had remained as good friends as before. This would be all that would be wanted. William could have his garden, which, after all, didn't so much matter with things as they were now —poor Hugo dead and he the one to come after— although—although—

The frown returned faintly to his face, and he added another paragraph:

"You said on Sunday that in spite of all the money you had spent on your garden, this was really a better one. Well, you know that I have had to cut down labour in it, and at this moment Pamela and Judith are at work on the tennis lawn, which they have to keep in order themselves if they want to play on it. That's

how it is here at Hayslope Hall now, and the girls are happy enough, though I can't spend what I used to on them, and what I should like to. So it really isn't necessary, especially in these days, when nearly everybody is feeling the pinch, to spend a fortune on a garden to get pleasure out of it. If I may say so, I think there's even a touch of vulgarity in it."

Another pause. He didn't want his pen to run away with him. Didn't the last sentence go rather beyond what he could say to William without offence?

No. They had had that out once, years before, in their father's time. Edmund Eldridge was at home on leave from the Curragh, and William on summer vacation from Cambridge. They were driving over to lunch at Pershore Castle, and William appeared for the expedition in a pair of lemon-coloured spats, a form of decorative summer attire then in its infancy. The cavalry subaltern, spick and span in a style of sober correctitude, objected to the lemon-coloured spats, and used the same word, vulgarity, in connection with them; and the undergraduate bowed meekly to his ruling and took them off.

Better leave it at that, though. He had said quite enough to bring William to his bearings, and relieved his own mind of the annoyance that had irked it. It was with quite another feeling underlying his words that he went on to write about the estate affairs in which he was relying upon William's help to deal with the Government. But this was not a matter in which there could be much indication of any state of feeling,

unless it was annoyance with the obliquity of the Department concerned; and his letter ended as his letters to William always did, whatever their subject: "Your affec. brother, Edmund Eldridge."

He read the letter over again before dispatching it, but did not detach himself from the varying moods in which it had been written, and when Mrs. Eldridge asked him later what he had said to William, he told her that he had just said that it would be a mistake to enlarge the Grange garden any further, and had written chiefly about another matter.

"You didn't say that he mustn't make *this* enlargement, did you, dear?" she asked.

"Oh, no. He can go on with that, as he has begun it. I must say that I think it *will* be the best thing that he has done there. I can't say that I like to see the pasture broken up, but there's been such a lot of it during the war that perhaps it's not so much of a point as it was. One seems to have to change one's views about everything nowadays. I dare say I'm a bit old-fashioned. Got to recognize that I'm getting older, I suppose."

"Dear man!" she said cooingly. "You'll never be old to me, and you don't look old either. Of the two I think you look younger than William, though he pays more attention to his appearance than you do. I hope I don't look *very* old myself. I don't really feel it. Still, women *have* to pay attention to their appearance when they reach the forties. Otherwise, people would leave off looking at them. Eleanor doesn't, much; but she's handsome in a different sort of way. I should

think she would outlast me; but I shan't make a fuss about it. I love Eleanor; she's so reliable. I'm glad you don't really mind their having their extra garden, dear. It will suit Eleanor better than all the tiresome pergolas and things. She will be able to be quiet in it."

CHAPTER VII

YOUNG PEOPLE

THE day had advanced to a heat unusual in our temperate climate. All nature seemed to be holding its breath in an endeavour to support it. There was no sound of bird life, and even the insects had ceased their stir of activity. After one set, somewhat languidly pursued, the tennis players betook themselves to the seats disposed near at hand, in a shade almost as torrid as the sun-steeped open. Judith was the only member of the party who showed no manifest signs of being overheated. Her almost southern-looking beauty was enhanced by the heat. She laughed at the others, and said that it could never be too hot for her.

Jim Horsham looked at her seriously, and said that in Australia he had experienced a heat of a hundred and twenty degrees, and at Christmas time, which made it all the more remarkable.

Pamela's eyes twinkled, and she roused herself from an exhausted reclining to ask: "Why does it make it all the more remarkable?"

"Well—Christmas time, you know," replied Jim, in the tone of one humouring an intellectually weaker vessel.

"Yes, I see that, Jim. But aren't the seasons just the other way round in Australia?"

"Well, of course they are. That's just what I was saying."

She laughed, and subsided again. "It's too hot to argue," she said.

"When were you in Australia?" asked Fred Comfrey.

Horsham replied conscientiously, with dates of arrival and departure, and the further information that he had acted as A. D. C. to an uncle who was Governor of one of the States.

"How informative you are, Jim!" said Pamela lazily. But Judith unexpectedly showed interest in Australia, and asked for exact details of the behaviour of the thermometer in that Dependency, which were given to her.

"Oh, it's much too hot to listen to all this," said Pamela, springing up from her low chair with no appearance of any essential lack of energy, in spite of the heat. "Let's go for a stroll in the wood."

This was said to Fred Comfrey, who responded with alacrity. His eyes had repeatedly rested upon Pamela, across the luncheon table, where she had talked and laughed with the gay freedom that was hers when she was feeling what Norman would have called good and happy, and during the game in which her light movements had been partnered with Horsham's responsible but slow-moving efforts, to their ultimate defeat. Horsham also looked at her as she arose, as if he would like to follow her; but his explanations to Judith were in full flood, and had to be carried to a conclusion. Pamela and Fred moved off together, and his eyes fol-

lowed them until they were lost among the trees, though there was no faltering in his firm dealings with degrees Fahrenheit.

"Jim's a dear old thing," said Pamela, when they were out of hearing, "but the idea sometimes crosses my mind that he's just a little bit of a bore. I hate to think it of him, so the best thing is to run away when he begins to show signs of it. We needn't run very far. There's a seat just out of hearing of them."

It was the seat in which she and Norman had been surprised by Fred and Hugo years before, from which had followed that quarrel that she had never heard about. She had even forgotten the disturbance that led up to it, but it was fresh enough in Fred's mind, and impelled him to ask with some awkwardness. "What sort of a fellow has Norman grown into? I didn't see him when he was here last week."

This brought her to a recollection of the hostility between them, and she answered a little stiffly: "He's just as much of a dear as ever." She had shared Norman's dislike of Fred in her childhood. She thought him improved, and wanted him to have a new chance with all of them. But she was on Norman's side—always, if it was a question of taking sides.

The improvement in Fred, from the hobbledehoy of twelve years before, would have been remarked by anybody. He was still stocky of build, but his frame had become smartened, and his stature, rather below the average, only indicated its strength. The close-cropped moustache that he wore had improved his appearance, and there was a degree of self-confidence in his bearing

which had not been there of old, when he had been alternately truculent and diffident. Whether or not he had improved in character was not so plain to see, but the years had brought him at least to a better understanding of the face that a man was expected to show before the world.

He laughed, a shade nervously, with his fingers at his moustache. If Pamela had been looking at him at that moment she would have seen him more like he had been as a boy than she had seen him hitherto in his manhood. "Norman and I had a quarrel about you the very last time I saw him," he said.

She did look at him then, with a hint of displeasure on her face. Recollection began to come to her. "Oh, yes," she said. "It was when you and Hugo found us here together."

He saw that he had made a mistake, and hastened to retrieve it. "I've always been sorry for what happened then," he said. "I'm ready to tell Norman so when I see him. Probably he has remembered it against me. We didn't always get on very well as boys, but I always liked him, really—and admired him too, for his pluck."

The slight frown had not yet left her face. "What did happen?" she asked.

"Well, we fought," he said, greatly daring. "That's what I so much regret. I was much bigger and stronger than he was. It didn't last long, and I don't think I damaged him much, for I don't believe you or anybody knew. Still, I don't excuse it in any way. I know I was rather a beast, as a boy. When one goes out into the world, and gets some sense knocked into one, one

becomes ashamed of a good many things, and some of them stick in one's mind. That did—that I fought a younger smaller boy, when I'd been in the wrong from the first. It's always been a sort of nightmare to me."

He spoke quietly, and with apparent sincerity. Pamela had a sense of something underlying the quarrel of which he spoke that she did not want to explore, brought by his first words—that the quarrel had been about her. But it was possible to put that aside. Her youthful generosity was touched by his admission. It fitted in with her own observation of him that the man and the boy might be two quite different creations, and this fact seemed to have presented itself to her out of her own knowledge of life, upon which she prided herself. "I think horrid little boys often turn into quite nice men," she said with a laugh. "I suppose you were rather horrid as a boy, though I don't remember much about you. So was poor Hugo, sometimes, though he turned into a very nice man. The war altered him a lot, before he was killed—poor Hugo! That's the sad thing, I think—that so many young men who were really made better by what they were doing in the war were killed, after all."

"Yes," he said. "It was a pretty hard school for some of us. But I had had a good deal of my schooling beforehand. I've always been glad that I was pitched out into the world when I was quite young. I had to fight for myself; and it wasn't fighting with boys younger than myself then—rather the other way about. I suppose that was what made me so ashamed of that business with Norman, and kept it alive in my mind."

She had forgiven him for that now, as he seemed to have found it difficult to forgive himself. "I don't think Norman has kept up any feeling about it," she said. "I suppose the smaller boy doesn't, does he? When you were the smaller boy and had to fight, I suppose you rather enjoyed it."

"Well, I did," he said. "It made a man of me. And it isn't over yet. I'd practically won my battle over there, and could go back and rest on my laurels. But I've a mind to begin it all again over here. There's something exhilarating in the fight itself; and if I win it the rewards will be greater."

It sounded rather fine to her. She did not translate the symbolism into the struggle of a young man of considerable commercial astuteness to gain a footing for himself, and when he had done so to seek the best opportunity of enlarging it. He was worthy of respect, in having already made a success of his work at an early age, and having left it to fight for the great cause, in which he had also made good. There was stuff in him, as there had been in his boyhood, when he had done well at his school; and it showed up now, to the disguising of what might have turned her against him. She had no suspicion that he was rapidly falling under the spell of her bright charm, for he had learnt some wisdom and self-control, and knew that there was a long and difficult road to travel before she could be expected even to see him on her level. He was content now, after the first little mistake, the reception of which had given him warning, to arouse and keep alive her interest in him, and to establish terms of friendship with her, upon which

there would be no suspicion of his presuming. She found it interesting to talk to him already, and was inclined to back him up with Norman, though not to the extent of turning herself into his champion. But he ought not to be held to the mistakes of his boyhood; and with all his faults he had been poor Hugo's friend, and had fought well in the war and been wounded, not lightly.

She asked him about that, and he answered her questions, modestly enough, though not without the design of attracting her sympathy. And they talked a little about Hugo. He seemed to have seen more good in Hugo than Norman had ever done, though Norman had never criticized him to her. But Norman had never said, as Fred did, that Hugo was a thoroughly good fellow, who had been a bit wild, like a good many more, but no more than that; and of course his fine service in the war had wiped out those mistakes many times over.

"Yes, that's what I feel," she said gratefully. "There was some trouble with Jim. I don't know what it was, but I know that Lord Crowborough made a fuss about it, and Dad was very angry. So it couldn't have been very bad. Besides, you can see what Jim is. If poor Hugo is supposed to have led him into mischief he couldn't have led him very far. *Nobody* could lead Jim very far into mischief. He wouldn't go."

She laughed her tinkling laugh, which was delicious music in Fred's ears. He laughed too, but did not make the mistake of taking up her criticism of Horsham. "I heard something about that too," he said; "but I

don't know any details either. I shouldn't think there could have been much in it. Naturally, Colonel Eldridge would have felt sore at his being criticized at all."

Norman had always kept off this subject, and would answer no questions about it. But he had never exonerated Hugo, though he had said that Jim was ass enough for anything. Norman *was* apt to be overcritical. He had nothing much to say in favour of Hugo, her own brother, who had been killed; he was contemptuous of Jim, who was only rather slow, and perhaps dull; and he was almost violent in his dislike of Fred, whom he hadn't seen for years. Of course he was head and shoulders above all three of them in everything that mattered, but perhaps he should have left it more to others to recognize that fact. At any rate, Fred was giving her something now which Norman withheld from her, and she was grateful for it.

Judith, left alone with Horsham, showed no disposition to regard herself in the light of a sacrifice. It seemed as if she really did take an interest in his statistics, and though she did not talk much herself her attention had the effect of drawing him out to be more informative than ever. "I do like to hear about real things," she said. "Such a lot that you read is so—so fluffy: do you know what I mean?"

"I suppose you mean poetry," he said.

"Well, I like some poetry; but it doesn't seem to be the sort that people who think they know call good poetry." She laughed at herself, the low musical laugh that was all her own. "Pam and Norman are always making fun of my tastes."

"Does Pamela like poetry?" Horsham asked, with a shade of anxiety.

"Oh, yes," she said, and a hint of mischief showed itself in her eyes. "Can you repeat any by heart?"

"Well, I don't know that I can, except the things I used to have to learn. I've never forgotten them. It seems as if I can't forget anything that I've once learnt. I could repeat 'The Wreck of the Hesperus,' which I learnt when I was five or six, I should think—you know, about the skipper had taken his little daughter to bear him company—I should think I could repeat that now, without a mistake."

The dark eyes were dancing with mischief now. "Oh, yes, I know it," she said. "It's lovely. And funnily enough it's one of Pamela's favourite poems, and Norman's too."

"Is it?" said Horsham doubtfully. "I didn't really think much of it myself; it was only that I did learn it once and couldn't forget it. Still, of course it is by Longfellow."

"Yes, I know. I like Longfellow myself. Pam and Norman pretend they don't. But Pam loves that particular poem. If you'd say it over to her—!"

"Well, I don't know that I should care about doing that. I expect she knows so much more poetry than I do."

"You could get her to talk about poetry and then just bring it out casually. Say you think it's so salient—that's the way she and Norman talk—and then say it over. I think she'd be pleased at finding you liked something that she did."

"Well, perhaps I might do that. What word did you say—salient?"

"Yes, or basic. That's another word they use a good deal. Perhaps you might bring them both in."

"Oh, I don't pretend to be learned in that sort of way. And as a matter of fact I don't really care much for poetry and all that sort of thing. I'm like you: I like facts."

Judith, having laid her train, returned to serious conversation. "I don't know why one should be ashamed of it," she said. "But I do keep my actual tastes rather dark before Pam. Of course she's much cleverer than I am, and I don't mind her poking fun at me a bit; in fact I rather enjoy it. But you're the first person I've ever confessed to that I really like dates and things of that sort. I find them—refreshing. Do you feel that too?"

Horsham's face lit up. It seemed that he did, and that he had never forgotten those of the Kings and Queens of England, which he had also learnt in childhood. They recited them together, with mutual pleasure, in a sort of measured chant, and laughed heartily when they had done so.

"Of course, that capacity, which we both seem to have, is going to be very useful to me in my career," Horsham said. "If you can get facts at your fingers' ends, and keep them there—"

"What career do you mean?" inquired Judith. "I didn't know you'd got one."

"Oh, yes. Don't tell anybody, because it isn't *quite* settled yet, but I'm going to be Private Secretary to—

unpaid, of course—to—well, perhaps I'd better not mention his name, even to you; but he's a Cabinet Minister. Perhaps I shall try to get into Parliament by and by."

"You can't, if you're a lord, can you?"

He explained that difficulty away for her for ever, so exhaustively did he handle it. He was going to take politics seriously. He thought it his duty; but it would also be his pleasure. "I've played the fool a bit," he confessed; "but that's all over now. I was young, and—"

He broke off in some confusion. He had suddenly remembered Hugo, and didn't know how much she knew of the disturbance of three years before.

She knew no more than Pamela, which was scarcely anything; but they had discussed it together. "You and Hugo played the fool together, didn't you?" she asked, with a slight frown.

He was rather taken aback by her directness, but he spoke as directly, after a short pause of reflection. "Hugo was blamed for what was just as much my fault as his," he said stoutly. "He was older than me—that was all. It's all over long ago—poor fellow!—and we don't want to think about it any more."

"I'm glad you've said it like that," she said with a glance of approval at him. "So will Pamela be. I shall tell her. But don't *you* say anything to her about it."

"You don't think—?"

"No, I don't. What you've said is quite enough, and we don't want to talk about it any more at all.

Let's go and find Pamela, and Fred. We might have another game before tea."

Horsham was quite willing to go and find Pamela, though he had unexpectedly enjoyed his chat with Judith, who struck him as a girl of quite remarkable intelligence. He told her so, as they walked together. "Of course you were only a kid when I was here last," he said, making allowances for her, and for himself.

"Yes," said Judith. "And you weren't much to write home about, either."

He looked surprised at this speech, until she laughed, when he laughed too. "You and Pamela both like chaffing a fellow, don't you?" he said. "I suppose some fellows wouldn't see it, and be offended. But I'm rather quick at seeing things, and I don't mind."

Judith suddenly felt an immense liking for him, compounded in a curious way of respect and tenderness. He was a heavily built young man, though his figure was upright, and had the activity of his youth. His face was neither handsome nor ugly, but there was a look of honesty and simplicity in it that gave it character. She felt a strong compunction at having prepared a trap for him. "I was chaffing you when I advised you to recite poetry to Pamela," she said hurriedly. "Don't you. At least, don't recite 'The Wreck of the Hesperus.' She'd think that tosh; and so do I."

This disturbed him for a moment, but he soon recovered. "I was an ass not to see what you were driving at," he said. "But you must remember that *I* never said I thought that was a fine poem."

"No, you didn't," she said soothingly. "And I don't suppose either of us really care much for what *they* would call fine poetry. What I do like of Longfellow's is his 'Psalm of Life'."

"Do you mean that?" he asked; and when she said she did he repeated slowly and impressively, as they walked beneath the trees:

"'Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not its goal.
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.'

"Ah, yes. That's poetry. I don't envy people who can't see the beauty of that."

CHAPTER VIII

WELLSBURY

Sir William and Lady Eldridge were spending the week-end at a great country house, the seat of a Cabinet Minister with whom Sir William had worked arduously during the war, to the undoubted advantage of the Department of which Lord Chippenham had been the head, and also to the advantage of the British taxpayer. For this Department—or at least that part of its work for which Sir William had been responsible—had escaped those accusations of waste and extravagance which were so freely and so regrettably made. The work had been done quietly, resourcefully and economically, and there were few who knew anything about its details. In fact, but for the large number of people who were rewarded for services during the war of whom nobody had ever heard before their names appeared in the Honours List, Sir William's knighthood might have aroused speculation. He had deserved it, at least as well as most, but it was not generally known what he had done, and there were to be found here and there those who thought that he had made money out of the war, and that his knighthood had eventuated in some way out of the money he had made. As a matter of fact he had done five years' hard work for nothing, and would have been richer than he was if he had confined his energies to his own

affairs. But that never troubled him. He was rich enough for all ordinary purposes as it was, even with the ruinous taxation to which his income was subjected; and now that his public work had been wound up, and he was free again to work for himself, he was likely to become richer still.

There had been two flies in the ointment of his public success. One was that a K. B. E. was hardly a sufficient reward for his valuable services. He knew how valuable they had been, and that others who had done work that could not be compared with his had won regards far higher. He had asked for nothing, and had not breathed to a soul except his wife the disappointment he had felt at the closing of the chapter. Perhaps if he had advertised himself more— But reflection always brought him the gratifying sense of having done his work not for the sake of reward, and he was too active and eager in pursuing the aims to which he had now returned to dwell upon the disappointment. At the same time his chief had also known the value of his work, and might, if he had exerted himself, have influenced a higher recognition of it.

The other source of dissatisfaction was a much smaller affair. In fact he was rather ashamed of allowing it entrance to his mind, and had never mentioned it to his wife.

Lord Chippenham was an eminent public servant. He was also—or rather Lady Chippenham was—an eminent personality in the social world. Sir William had worked with him over years, but had never become intimate with him. He had dined once or twice with

him in London; but in those strenuous times of the war that meant nothing, and since the war, when social entertainments were beginning to take their normal course, he had not even done that. Indeed, Lord Chippenham seemed to have forgotten him altogether, and he could not help feeling a little sore about it.

But then at last had come the invitation to Wellsbury, the famous Elizabethan house where it had been Lady Chippenham's pleasure to gather together parties of all that was most brilliant in the world, not only of fashion but of art and letters and whatever else could add variety and interest to her parties. The invitation gave him great pleasure, which he could not keep from his wife, who took it calmly enough. There were plenty of what are called "good houses" open to them, and if it had been their ambition to climb into the social prominence that is represented by mixing always with those who keep in the busy swim, there would have been no difficulty about it. That was no more of an end to him than it was to her; but Wellsbury was different. The climbers were not asked there; or if they were, their climbing ambitions were not the qualities most apparent in them. Also, you went to Wellsbury to enjoy yourself.

Sir William enjoyed himself exceedingly. So did Lady Eldridge, who found people among the numerous guests whom she liked and who liked her. They were not all strangers either. The Eldridges had a large circle of acquaintance in London, which touched other circles, and was always enlarging itself. There

were people at Wellsbury during that week-end who knew less of the world gathered there than they did.

At least half the guests bore names that were well known, and some were of real eminence. And there were many young people, who made themselves merry, and were encouraged to do so, not only by their hostess, who was merry and high-spirited herself, but by the venerated Minister of State, who listened with a twinkling eye to the hubbub of talk and laughter that arose around him, and sometimes contributed to it. He spent much of his time durnig the day with the children who were collected there with the rest, and had a grandchild seated on either side of him at lunch on Sunday. He was a very charming benign old gentleman in his own lovely home; the word "harmless" might perhaps have been used to describe him as he showed himself there, and William Eldridge gained some amusement from the recollection of episodes in his official hours, when that epithet would not have seemed suitable.

It did occur to Sir William once or twice during those lovely summer days to ask himself whether he had been invited to Wellsbury with any particular object. He and his wife had been received there almost as if they were habitués of the house; and yet it was over a year since he had had word with Lord Chippenham at all, and this private recognition of him was at least tardy. But there was so much to see and to do, in the great house, full of its wonderful treasures, and full, too, of agreeable and interesting people, that he

gave himself up to the flow of it all, and put aside the idea of anything to come of the visit except the pleasure of the visit itself.

Rain came on late on Sunday morning, and though it was not enough to keep everybody indoors and never looked like continuing, Sir William took the opportunity of writing a few letters after luncheon. There was a little panelled room off the billiard-room, which he had seen the evening before, with just one lovely early Dutch picture in it, and he went there rather than to his own room upstairs, partly because he wanted to look at the picture again, partly because of the satisfaction of making use of as many rooms as possible in this beautiful ancient house, in which for two days he was at home.

There was nobody in the billiard-room, or in the inner room, which was open to it, but also in part concealed. He had been there for some little time when two young men came into the billiard-room and began to play. He recognized them by their voices as Nigel Byrne, Lord Chippenham's private secretary, and William Despencer, the youngest son of the house. He went on writing, being now immersed in what he was doing, as his habit was, and paid no further attention to them. It did not occur to him that they would not know that anybody was in the inner room; he did not think about it at all, concentrated as his mind was on his writing. The click of the balls and the voices of the young men, who were playing in desultory fashion and talking all the time, came to him as an accompaniment to his thoughts, but with no more meaning than

the noises of traffic would have had if he had been writing in a room in London.

But presently, as he leant back in his chair to consider something, a phrase struck upon his ear, and he woke up to the disagreeable fact that they were talking about him, and for all he knew might have been talking about him for the last ten minutes.

"The Chief thinks a lot of him. He did extraordinarily good work in the war."

"I know he did. These big business men did make themselves useful—some of them. Did pretty well out of it too."

"Eldridge didn't."

It was at this point that Sir William woke up to their speech, but what had come immediately before his name was mentioned, which his ears had taken in without conveying it to his brain, also turned itself into meaning.

"Perhaps not; though you never know. Anyhow, he's a new man, and I think we've saddled ourselves with quite enough of them. I think we ought to get back to the old sort—the men who come of good stock. They've always been the backbone of our party, and—"

The speaker was surprised by the appearance of the man he had been criticizing. Sir William stood in the arched recess at the end of the room, his pen in his hand, and a smile upon his face.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said. "I've been writing in there, and have only just realized that you were talking about me."

The young men stared at him in consternation, and

he spoke again, with the air of one who meant to dominate the situation. That was exactly what he did mean. A sudden crisis always strung him up to the most effective control of his powers, and he had formed his decision in the few seconds that had elapsed between the mention of his name and his standing before them.

"I really haven't been listening," he said. "I was too busy with what I was doing, or I'd have stopped you before. But I'm not exactly a new man, you know. You can look me up in a book, if you like. Eldridge of Hayslope, in Downshire. And I give you my word I haven't made a bob out of the war." Then he turned to go back to his writing.

William Despencer had been collecting himself during this speech. He was a young man of a serious cast of mind, conspicuously honest and straightforward, though of an outlook not of the widest. "I'm sorry you overheard what we were saying," he said. "And I apologize for the mistake I seem to have made. I'm glad you corrected me."

Sir William turned to him again, but Nigel Byrne broke in before he could speak. "You heard me defend you," he said with a pleasant smile, which, with his attractive appearance and ready speech was part of his qualification for the position he so admirably filled. "William was talking generally, and I happened to know that you weren't of the type. You'd have heard me say so when he came to the end of his speech; but he's always too long-winded."

"Oh, I don't mind that a bit," said Sir William. "I've been doing the things that the new men do—and

some of the old ones too—for some years past. It was a natural mistake. I'm only sorry I let you in for it by keeping quiet in here. To tell you the truth, I wasn't thinking of you. Perhaps I ought to apologize for that. Anyhow, please forget it."

"We will," said Byrne. "No offence meant and none taken, eh? I was coming to look for you after William and I had had our little game. The Chief wants you to go for a stroll with him at half-past three, if it clears up, and if not, will you go and have a chat with him in his room? I'll take you to him."

The invitation was so significant that it put out of Sir William's mind the awkwardness of the late occurrence, as he waited for the time when the great man should be ready for him. Perhaps it was only a mark of politeness to a guest, and there would be talk about this and that, but about nothing that would matter much to him. The work that they had been engaged upon together was over, and Lord Chippenham was not likely to want to go back to that. What could he want to see him about then? He hardly permitted himself to conjecture; but there was a sense of excitement hanging over him, and he looked many times at his watch as he went here and there in the house and examined the pictures and the other treasures of it, with appreciation, but not with all his attention.

When he had left the billiard-room the two young men looked at one another and Nigel Byrne laughed. "He took it very well, I think," he said. "Quite a nice fellow!"

William Despencer kept a grave face. "I wish I'd

known he was there," he said. "Why didn't he let us know he was there when we came in?"

"Oh, I don't think he was eavesdropping. I say, lets look him up. I'm bound to say I never thought of him as anything but the usual rich city fellow, with no father to speak of."

"Like Melchizedek. I thought you were going to defend him against my aspersions, if he'd given you time."

"That was my famous tact, William. Eldridge of what, did he say? Ah, here it is."

There were current books of reference on a table in the billiard-room, and Byrne had opened one which dealt faithfully with the County Families and their genealogies.

"Oh, quite respectable!" he said, as they read the entry together. "He's next man in, too, do you see? Present man's only son killed in the war. He was at Harrow and Cambridge. We've done him an injustice, William. If at any time he likes to make a little contribution to party funds, and somebody or other recommends him for a peerage, he won't have to begin everything from the beginning like so many of them."

"Is that the idea?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. Peerages aren't bought and sold in the market, you know, William. You ought to know better than that."

"Well, I still think the mistake was a natural one," said William Despencer, turning away. "He's too elaborate altogether. Those clothes! Just what a rich

city fellow would wear who'd just discovered Saville Row."

"They're no better than mine. He's a good-looking fellow and likes to keep his youth. The Chief thinks a lot of him, you know. He'd like to work with him too, if he was in Parliament."

"His wife's a nice woman. I shall talk to her this evening. I'm sorry he heard me say what I did."

The sun had come out by the time Lord Chippenham was ready for his afternoon walk. Sir William's expectations of a serious talk were a little dashed when he discovered that it was to be taken in the company of two little granddaughters and two little dogs, and as they went down through the gardens and across the park it seemed as if Lord Chippenham's attention would be chiefly taken up by the four of them. However, no other grown-up person had been invited to join the party, and presently the children and the dogs detached themselves, and only returned to their base now and then, when Lord Chippenham broke off in whatever he might have been saying and talked to them until they were off again.

When the walk was over, and Sir William tried to give some concise account of what had happened to his wife, he found it difficult to put any particular point to it. Lord Chippenham seemed to want him in some undefined way, but had made no actual proposal. He ought to be in Parliament—perhaps as a preliminary to —to office? It almost seemed as if that were indicated; but it was all so vague, and the children were always interrupting at the most critical moments. At one time

it almost seemed as if he were hinting that a seat in the House of Lords would be the simplest way to—to what? Really, it was impossible to say. The only definite thing that could be taken hold of was that when they had come in, Lord Chippenham, turning to go into his room, had said: "Well, I think we could do good work together again, and I hope we shall."

The i's seemed to be dotted to some extent later on in the day by Nigel Byrne, who made himself agreeable to Lady Eldridge, and told her that the Chief thought a lot of her husband. "Of course he ought to be in Parliament," he said. "Has he ever thought about it, do you know?"

Eleanor thought that was intended as a preliminary to anything that might be preparing, though why Lord Chippenham or Mr. Byrne couldn't say so outright she couldn't think. And why had the constituency of West Loamshire been mentioned as a likely one, to her and not to William? Politics seemed to be a curiously mysterious game. Still, West Loamshire, where there was likely to be a vacancy shortly —though this was not to be repeated—*had* been mentioned; and, "I suppose your husband knows George Weldon—the Whip, you know," had been one of the things said that she had to report. She supposed they were meant to put two and two together. Probably, if William went to see George Weldon, he would get on to a more direct path altogether.

They talked it all over, motoring back to London the next morning. William had sometimes considered a parliamentary career, but not very seriously. He

had been too busy with his affairs to take a great deal of interest in politics except where they touched his interests. It would be beginning something all over again, and the preliminary steps to candidature and election would take up a lot of time and money. But it would be different if the preliminaries were made easy for him, and there was something waiting for him that other men had to work up to through years. He was confident of being able to fill any position that might come to him, and had enough patriotism to make the prospect of doing something for his country that he could do better than other people attractive to him.

Eleanor would encourage him too. She was quite as interested in the possibilities they discussed together as he was. He knew that she was not particularly interested in his financial career. It had already brought them to the point where they had everything they wanted that money would give them, and that was all that business meant to her. What was the good of going on for the rest of your life just making more money? But she had liked him to tell her about the work he had been doing during the war, and it would be the same if he took up public work again.

They fell silent for a time, after they had talked it all over, and the big car carried them easily and swiftly along the country roads. Wellsbury was a two hours' run from London by the most direct route, but they were making it rather longer, so as to see more of the country and to avoid the straight high roads.

Sir William never failed to enjoy a ride in this fine car of his, which he had recently acquired, at immense

expense. He did thoroughly enjoy all the things that his money bought him, and liked spending it on them; and the point of satiety which lies somewhere ahead on that road was not yet in sight with him. He enjoyed the luxurious upholstery of his new car; and even the well-clothed back of his chauffeur, with the discreet figure of Eleanor's maid beside it, gave him satisfaction, as adding to the conveniences of his life and hers. He liked to feel well dressed too, and that Eleanor should also be so; and that she should be the kind of woman who carried off beautiful and expensive clothes. He thought that she looked the equal of any of the women who had been at Wellsbury, and he was proud of her, and of the notice that had been taken of her.

Whatever might be the result of this visit, or if there should be no result of it, it stood as a source of completed gratification in itself. It seemed to have put the seal of success upon his career, and to have set him where he rightly belonged. It was not the sort of recognition that could have been gained by the possession of money, though in his case success in money-making had indirectly led up to it. His reflections were crossed by a momentary shadow at the remembrance of the mistake those two young men—or at least one of them—had made about him yesterday. Surely Lord Chippenham's son might have known that a merely new rich man would not have been made welcome at Wellsbury as he had been. There had been no one remotely resembling that breed among the guests of this party. Still, he had put that right, and it didn't really matter. He was perhaps aware in the background of his mind

that exuberance was a note to be watchful of; his upbringing and the standards it had inculcated had made him careful to prune himself. He would not have been so careful if criticism from time to time had not shown him the necessity. Edmund, to whom as a young man he had looked up as the pattern of quiet, self-possessed good breeding, had criticized him on those grounds. He had never quite lost the feeling that Edmund was a finer type of gentleman than himself—until lately, when his own brilliant gifts had brought him into such prominence as Edmund would never attain to. Now he was a little impatient of that old feeling of slight inferiority to his brother, and whatever had survived of it seemed to have been wiped out by this visit to Wellsbury. Edmund would never have been invited to such a house unless it had happened to lie in his local zone of dignity as a landowner.

Sir William considered, in the glow of his satisfaction, as he was carried along between the hedgerows and the full-blossomed trees, the stock from which he had sprung and the altitudes to which he had arisen, which wanted some adjustment if he were to be proud of both, as his inclination was.

A family that went back two or three hundred years, and for most of the time as landowners in the same county, was something that only a small minority could claim. Yet the Eldridges had never really done anything that put them above the ruck of country squires. They had intermarried here and there with families of higher standing; they had kept their heads up in the world, and were in all the County Histories—

as names, but little more. Their dignity had hardly extended beyond the head of the family for the time being. The younger sons were scarcely better off in that respect than the sons of other men, who could give them the right sort of education and start in life. He himself had begun life with no greater advantages than his contemporaries at school and university of birth not so good as his, and if he had not brought his own exceptional gifts into play he would have had just the position that his success at the Bar might have brought him, and no higher. Of course the altered circumstances brought about by the death of his brother's heir would have made a great difference to him, at least in prospect; but that loomed small now. But for the sentimental attachment which he felt towards the home of his fathers, he would not have cared much now to be Squire of Hayslope. It would not now be his chief claim to consideration, and if he had wished he could have bought himself a finer house than Hayslope and a larger property. Still, Hayslope did mean a good deal to him, and he was inclined to congratulate himself upon being content with the enlarged Hayslope Grange as his country house, and the consequent playing second fiddle to his brother, when he could so easily have been first somewhere else.

He spoke some of the thoughts which were running through his mind when he broke the silence to say to his wife: "I'm afraid poor old Edmund is having a thin time at Hayslope. Hard luck that the owner of a property like that should be pinched, as most of them are in these days, and we who used to think ourselves

so much less fortunate should have got quite past them!"

She thought it nice of him to be thinking about his brother's difficulties at this time. She knew that he was exalted by the visit to Wellsbury, and the expectation of something to come out of it. He might have been thought to be full of his own affairs.

"I've had them a good deal on my mind," she said—"Edmund and Cynthia too, and the girls. But we can do something for them, can't we? I think I've been able to do something for Cynthia already, and without making her seem under an obligation."

"Oh, you can do things for Cynthia. But Edmund—he stands so on his dignity, you see. I think he's inclined to stand too much on his dignity, at least with me. After all, a country squire—I've come to be a good deal more than that, and I'm the one person whom he might accept help from."

"Does he really need help?"

"Oh, he can get along all right, of course. But it's a different life for him now. I suppose I couldn't expect him to accept money from me so that they could carry on in the way they did before the war. I'd give it him readily enough if he would, and be glad to. But there are ways in which I *could* help him—one in particular. But one must take him as he is. We must do what we can for Cynthia and the girls, and I shall always be on the lookout to do something for him if I can. I've got on and he's stood still—or gone back, rather. I don't want him to go back any further."

CHAPTER IX

LETTERS

The Eldridges arrived home in time for luncheon. They lived in a large house in Belgravia, old enough to have some character of space and dignity, but old enough also to have been exceedingly inconvenient if much money had not been spent in modernizing it. It had been their London home for about fifteen years, and was a trifle behind the latest fashion in furnishing and decoration. The latest of such fashions, it should be recognized, rests upon the recognition of the value of older fashions, which in its fulness dates from a very few years back. There was plenty of good old furniture in the Eldridges' house, some of it now of considerable value, but it would have welded itself into quite a different whole if the "doing up" and furnishing of the house had been taken in hand some years later than it was. The time was approaching when Sir William would acquire another, possibly still larger house, and begin all over again. He was already vaguely dissatisfied with this one; but it had qualities which pleased him too, and he had never quite lost the sense of satisfaction with which he had moved into it from a smaller house and spent money upon making it the place in which they should live the larger life that was then opening out before them. His

own room, with its outlook upon a little square of walled-in garden, was a very refuge, and he and his wife sometimes sat there in the few evenings when they were at home together alone, in a grateful seclusion of green morocco and bright Turkey carpet, with books and prints on the Morris-decked walls, and only the huge and hideous American desk, of the palest possible growth of oak, to indicate the sterner purposes to which the room was primarily dedicated.

Sir William went into this room on their arrival, and turned over the pile of letters and papers that were there awaiting him. He opened a few of them, and glanced over their contents, and then unlocked his desk, but only to put certain of the papers away. He was too excited to take up his immediate affairs in the short time that remained before luncheon, though on ordinary occasions he would have done so, for he hated wasting even a few minutes of his time.

He had thought over what had happened, and what might happen during the journey to London. But, coming thus into his familiar room, he seemed to see it all with a new significance. He had the feeling that he had come back to this room a different man—a bigger man than the one who had used it before; and the feeling rather surprised him. For, after all, to spend a few days in a large country house was no new experience to him, he had been in close contact with Lord Chippenham before for many months upon end, and the idea of a seat in Parliament was not entirely a novelty. What had happened, he decided, as he walked up and down the room, or stood looking out upon the green and

bright colour of the little paved square of garden, was that he had attained to recognition, when he had thought that the official chapter of his life was closed. It set a higher value on it, even to himself. He was *not* the same man as had for so long occupied this room, and thought of his public work as efficiently done for the good of his country, but as already a thing of the past. The chapter was not closed, but might lead to other chapters, beyond the present scope of his imagination. It had put him among the men of his time who counted for something. Lord Chippenham, whatever his stirring of expectation might have meant, undoubtedly thought of him as counting for something already. The last year, during which he had attended to his affairs, and spent as much of his time as he could spare from them at Hayslope, had only been a lull. His foot was already on the ladder of distinction, and he might mount on it higher than he had ever thought of mounting.

He was summoned to luncheon, and took some of his as yet unopened letters in with him. He did not come to the one from his brother until he and his wife were alone together.

"Well, I never—!"

Lady Eldridge looked up, to see his face dark and angry. "Read that," he said, throwing the letter across to her; "the first part, I mean," and waited till she had done so, though phrases of indignation kept rising to his lips, which he stifled by occupying them with food and drink, too hastily consumed.

He did not wait for her remarks, when she looked up again, with consternation on her face. "You heard

what I said about Edmund only just this morning," he broke out. "I'm always thinking what I can do for him, and that's the way he treats me in return. Really, it's incredible!"

"I must say I'm surprised," she said unwillingly as it seemed, and turned to the letter again.

"It's beyond everything," he went on angrily. "'This treatment must stop'—what is it that he says? Haven't I always deferred to him at Hayslope, because he's my elder brother, and lately I've been sorry for him? What on earth can he mean by writing to me like that? *What* treatment, I should like to know! I've spent thousands of pounds on his property, and should never have got a penny of it back if it hadn't been for Hugo's death. His position on his own ground! What have I ever done to belittle it?"

She looked up again. "I thought you did consult him about the garden," she said.

"Of course I did. I've never left anything of that sort undone, though under the circumstances in which we stand to one another most men wouldn't have expected it. But I know what he is where his rights are concerned."

"But didn't he give his consent?"

Sir William hesitated. "After that letter, I suppose one has to say that he didn't. But you can see how it was. There was absolutely no reason for his withholding it. I practically told him I was going to do it, and he put forward some objections, which I met. He didn't press them, and I went away thinking it was all understood. If you like to say so, perhaps I didn't

ask his permission at all. It would have seemed absurd to do so."

"I am very sorry that he has taken it like this. Of course his letter is unreasonable, but I think it is only meant to assert his rights. He doesn't mean to stop you going on."

"Oh, I'm not going on in the face of that. I shall wire to Coombe to stop the work. Besides, he does mean that, doesn't he? Let me read it again."

She handed over the letter. Her face was disturbed. "I don't think Cynthia can have seen it before it was sent," she said.

"There's nothing about going on. I'm told that I've overstepped my rights, and 'this sort of treatment must now stop.' And fancy writing this! 'I think there's a touch of vulgarity in it.' Vulgarity! It's a most offensive letter. One would say that he was laying himself open to quarrel with me. I'm not going to quarrel with him; but I shall be precious careful not to give him a handle against me again."

"I don't think he wants to quarrel. It's his way. He wouldn't think of the effect his words might have. I don't think he even wants to stop you making the garden."

"Oh, I'm not going on with it now. For one thing, this would spoil all the pleasure of it. After all, I've got other things to think of besides garden-making at the Grange. It has just been a recreation, but now I dare say I shall be too much occupied to be able to pay so much attention to it. Really, you know, it's ridiculous for Edmund to give himself those airs of su-

periority over me. I've given way too much to them in the past. I wouldn't say so to anybody but you, but what *is* Edmund's position compared to mine? I'm the last man in the world to give myself airs because of what I've done in the world; and with him especially I've made nothing of it, because—well, because I've hated the idea of making a contrast between him and myself. But what I can't help feeling is that *he* might consider all that too. I think if I were the elder brother I should have shown a good deal more pleasure than *he* has ever done at whatever success I have had."

"Perhaps he's a little bit jealous. I've thought that sometimes. I don't think Cynthia is, and perhaps such a feeling might be expected more from her than from him."

"Of course he's jealous. That's at the root of it all. It's a very unworthy feeling from one brother to another."

"I don't think he would recognize it as jealousy, and if he detected such a feeling in himself I think he would be ashamed of it. He *is* fond of you, there's no doubt about it, and he relies on you, perhaps more than he knows. He *can't* mean to quarrel, and if you don't treat this letter as an offence it will all blow over."

"My dear girl, what would you have me to do? I'm not going to sit down under it. My position at Hayslope would be impossible if I were to give in to this sort of thing."

"No, dear, I don't think so. You know Edmund so

well. You know that he is fond of you. You have always liked being near one another, and you've had little jars before, which have made no difference."

"Nothing like this. I call a letter like that positively insulting."

"It can't have been meant to be that. If you take it in the right way he'll be sorry for having written it. If you take it as an insult—"

"What *is* the right way of taking it then?"

She thought for a moment, and said with slightly heightened colour: "You are bigger than Edmund. If he has made a mistake, you can afford not to make the same mistake."

His face changed at that. "You always put me right," he said, with a smile at her. "Yes, of course. Poor old fellow! He's had a lot to try him. He doesn't get out into the world as I do, and of course he broods over his troubles. Any little thing upsets him."

She smiled at him in her turn. "That's how I'm sure it is," she said. "If he does object to this garden plan, it isn't much to give it up, is it? Just a little extra amusement, as you said."

He laughed, rather ruefully. "I don't like giving up something that I've set in hand," he said. "But if it will placate my respected brother—"

"Perhaps he won't want you to, if you return him a soft answer."

"I'll do that all right. If a thing's worth doing at all it's worth doing well. Besides, you've blown away my annoyance, and, after all, it's more in accordance

with my nature to be generous than to be resentful—don't you think?"

That was just what she did think. He was quick-tempered, but she had had abundant experience of the quick revulsion of feeling that came to him when his generosity was appealed to, and loved him for it. Her own impulsions drove her upon a more level course. He had no idea of the anger that his brother's letter had aroused in her mind, that had held her even while she was pleading for him, and that held her still, when by her prompting he had chased his away from him. Her accusation of jealousy had been the only sign of it in her speech, and she had entirely agreed with him when he had stigmatized that as a most unworthy feeling under the circumstances that had called it forth. It had cost her an effort to insist upon the ties that held the brothers together. To her mind, Colonel Eldridge, with his narrow outlook, and his claims of superiority, was undeserving of the affection which her husband constantly showed towards him, and showed little enough of it in return, though it was true that he relied upon his brother, and made use of him.

Still, when she was alone and thought it all over, she was glad that she had spoken as she had, putting aside her own feelings, and playing, as she always could, upon his, which were so large and generous. There was Cynthia to be thought of, who was putting a brave face upon the restrictions that had so marred her life, and who expressed only to her, because she was her best-loved friend, what they meant to her. And there were the dear children, whom she loved, and the more because

she had no daughter of her own. No, it would never have done to allow a breach to open, as might well have happened, if Edmund's crabbed obstinacy had been answered in the way it deserved. They were too much bound up together at Hayslope not to make all allowances for one another, even where no allowance was rightly due. Besides, the path of tolerance was always the right path, though it might not be easy to take it.

To Sir William, that path had its allurements. His nature was generous and he recognized it. It was with a glow of self-gratulation that he sat down after luncheon to answer his brother's letter; and he enjoyed the art with which he brought to bear upon it, so that his meaning should be made plain, and also his large-minded tolerance.

Beginning "My dear Edmund," he first of all wrote fully about the affair in which he was interesting himself on behalf of his brother. A good deal depended upon the way in which he dealt with it, and he showed that his interests were deeply engaged. In fact, something had already been done, for the Government Department concerned was that of which Mr. Vincent, one of his fellow guests at Wellsbury, was the head.

"We have just returned from our visit to Wellsbury, and fortunately Henry Vincent was staying there. I had a talk with him about the principle of the thing, and I think I may say that I put the right idea into his head, and that he will act on it generally. I told him that there was a personal application of it which I wouldn't trouble him with, and he told me the right man to go to, and said that I could say he had done so. I

shall follow it up to-morrow, and I hope everything will be satisfactorily arranged. It is fortunate that I was able to talk it over with Vincent. I had never happened to meet him before, and it didn't do me any harm to come first into contact with him at Wellsbury."

That was that. Edmund would be pleased at the probability of this tiresome affair being settled, and perhaps impressed with the ease with which such settlements were arranged, when it was possible to approach the well-guarded head of a Department on equal terms.

And now for the other matter! which should be dealt with shortly but decisively, and cleared out of the way altogether as a source of complaint.

He considered it for a time. He was sincere in his desire to act generously in face of an unreasonable attack. But the offence was really considerable, pointed as it was by that disagreeable charge of vulgarity, and it was of no use to pretend it wasn't there. He would give way; but with a gesture. The gesture would be that it was not worth while bothering about so small an affair, which could best be expressed in a few lines. Edmund was not to suppose that he had given him annoyance; the annoyance was past—or nearly so. He clung to the idea of terseness, but lest it should be misunderstood, the atmosphere of friendliness might perhaps best be indicated by something more intimate coming before it.

So he added a paragraph or two about the visit to Wellsbury, the magnificence of the house, and the illustriousness of the party gathered there. There was something also about Lord Chippenham in his private

relations. "I had worked with him for nearly four years," he wrote, "without really knowing him intimately. He is extraordinary in the way he keeps his public and private lives apart, and one feels it an honour, even after all this time, to have been accepted on terms of personal friendship with him."

The kernel of the letter immediately followed.

"I am sorry that I inadvertently went against your wishes in the matter of Barton's Close. I didn't understand you actually withheld your consent to the garden-making, or of course I should not have set it in hand. I have wired to Coombe to stop the work."

That was terse enough. The only thing was that it might settle it too completely. He didn't want to give up his garden if it could be avoided. Edmund ought not to be discouraged from asking that the work should go on, though he would not write anything to show that that was in his mind. He went on:

"I was rather keen on this addition to the garden, and think it would have improved the property, if anything. But where Hayslope is concerned, my chief desire is to work in with your ideas, even where they differ from mine."

Would Edmund recognize this note of large generosity? It was to be hoped so—and give way.

He read his brother's letter again, and asked himself whether it was possible to ignore the rudeness of it. After careful consideration he added another paragraph.

"I think, my dear Edmund, that your general charge against me of overriding your wishes and belittling

your position at Hayslope can hardly be seriously made. Such an attitude would be very far from my intentions, and I cannot charge my memory with any single instance of my having done so. If I have given you any cause for such an accusation, as I suppose I must have done, or you would not have brought it against me, it can only have been because I have been so occupied with affairs outside Hayslope that I have perhaps treated Hayslope itself as of less importance than it naturally is to you. If so, I apologize. Hayslope still holds the warmest corner in my heart of any place in England, or out of it for that matter. But the world is a large place, and when one is taking a part, however modest, in dealing with the difficulties that it is now involved in, the affairs of one small corner of it do not bulk so large as if one could give all one's attention to them."

He ended resolutely. The intended terseness had already been somewhat whittled away, and it was not his idea to read Edmund a lecture, or he might have read him a much longer one. This would suffice. In the future he might be more closely devoted to the task of putting the world straight again than he was now, and Hayslope would be of still less importance to him. If Edmund had his dignity as Squire of Hayslope so much at heart, it must strike even him that the dignity of a probable Cabinet Minister—so far had Sir William's aspiring thoughts led him in the last few hours—was considerably above it. On reading his letter, he thought that it might have been better to close with the sentence ending, " my having done so," and omit that beginning, " If I have given you any cause." But that would

have involved rewriting four whole pages, and the *coda* was really only a slight fault in the technique of his protest, and not in its intention. So he left the letter as it was, and presently posted it himself.

Lady Eldridge also addressed a letter to Hayslope that afternoon, to her sister-in-law. She usually wrote to her once in the week, and knew that she would want to hear all about the visit to Wellsbury. But she did not begin with that.

"Dearest Cynthia:—I am sorry that Edmund is annoyed about the garden. I am sure *you* know that neither William nor I would want to do anything at the Grange that he objected to, but I can't help thinking that his putting a veto on it is rather unreasonable. William has telegraphed for the work to be stopped, but I do hope that Edmund doesn't really mean that the garden is not to be made. It would be such a disappointment, for you know what fun we have had in working it all out. William does love Hayslope, and all that he has done at the Grange. Perhaps in the future he may have more work to do, and Hayslope will be more of a recreation to him than ever. So try to get it put right if you can. William thinks so much of Edmund, and I'm sure Edmund does of William too. He can't really want to put such a slight on him as this would be. I think William has shown, by wiring at once for the work to be stopped, that he doesn't want to go against Edmund. I'm not sure, from his letter, that Edmund will even have expected that. If not, do get him to withdraw. I can write this

plainly to you, though perhaps William couldn't to Edmund, after his letter. Men are more unreasonable than we are, though they prefer to call it logical. But we can't helping loving them all the same—those that we *do* love."

Then she went on to tell all about Wellsbury, and gave an amusing account of their visit, full of light descriptive detail of the men and women they had met there, with some descriptions from the inside of a house that was famous throughout the world. But she wrote nothing of what had been said to her about her husband, and gave no hint of anything that might be coming to him.

CHAPTER X

RECONCILIATION

The Earl of Crowborough, though he lived in a Castle, and enjoyed a rent-roll which provided him with everything that was suitable to his rank in the way of elaborate living, yet shared many simple tastes with people of less exalted station. Among them was that of propelling himself about on a tricycle. He had acquired one of those machines in their early days of solid rubber tires, before the invention of the safety bicycle, and ridden it for many years, until it became almost a curiosity, or what the shops call an "antique." He would probably have continued to ride it until it could be repaired no longer; but riding through the village of Pershore one morning he had heard somebody—he never wished to inquire whom—call out: "Here comes that old fool on his bone-shaker!" After that he had bought a new tricycle of the latest pattern and its pneumatic tires and easy running had given him a new delight in his chosen form of exercise and locomotion; so that he could hardly be persuaded to drive in a motor-car or behind horses when he was in the country, and would have ridden his tricycle in London if he had not shrunk from the comments that might reach his ears.

It was on his tricycle that he rode over to Hayslope one afternoon to look up his old friend, Colonel

Eldridge. He did want this unpleasantness between them ended, and though he believed that he had been the chiefly injured party, his kindness of heart prompted him to have done with it all and forget it. He was a creature of habit, and Hayslope and the people who lived there had come into his life in the country ever since his childhood. At the height of the recent disturbances he had never got rid of the feeling of discomfort when custom had suggested to him that he should ride over to Hayslope, as he had so often been wont to do, and he had realized that the familiar road was closed to him. He had continued to visit the Grange, but it was not the same thing. The Grange was new, at least in its present aspect; the Hall was the same as he had always known it—a nice comfortable place full of old memories which kept alive old friendships. There was no other house within reach of his that he liked so much. And though he liked William Eldridge, it was Edmund towards whom his deeper feelings went out. They had been friends for nearly fifty years. Lord Crowborough did not possess many intimate friends, and there was no special community of taste between him and Colonel Eldridge, or even of interest, outside their common interests as neighbouring landowners. But a tie had grown up between them. Edmund Eldridge did not make the demands upon his substantial but slow moving intellect that William did; they were always at ease together.

He could not do without his old friend. Speculation was alien to his habit of mind, but he did sometimes wonder, during the course of their estrangement,

whether the same sense of blankness might not be working in Edmund as well. At last he decided to go over and see. He made no plans as to what he should do if he were received coldly, nor did he intend to make any appeal. He wanted Edmund again, and it was in his mind, though not consciously defined as an expectation, that Edmund would be glad to see him.

Behold him, then, laboriously pedalling up the drive to Hayslope Hall on a warm afternoon, a not undignified figure, though his large form lurched and swayed as he took the rise, and his chosen form of country costume was a suit of pepper and salt and a high-crowned felt hat. But for his coloured tie, he might have been taken for a country parson of the older school, and he would not have been displeased at the comparison, for he was a pillar of the church on its official side, and had a greater regard for its religious significance than many of its supporters in that aspect.

Life was pursuing its ordinary course at Hayslope Hall on a summer afternoon. In these leaner times lawn tennis was apt to be the chief of its recreations, and the excuse for the gathering together of neighbours. There were several of them in the garden as Lord Crowborough was convoyed across the lawn, mopping his super-heated brow, and wishing that his first appearance were a little less public. Colonel Eldridge was playing; but he left off immediately, and after greeting his old friend called to somebody else to take his place in the game, though Lord Crowborough begged him to continue it.

Colonel Eldridge was not a man to show his emotions

except occasionally that of annoyance, but they were strong within him as his eyes fell upon the familiar figure advancing towards him, and would have made it impossible for him to continue the game, though he was in the middle of his service.

He had never realized until that moment—perhaps he had forbidden himself the realization—how warm a corner there was in his heart for this tall, bulky figure, and how empty that place had been of late. The last vestiges of resentment against him melted away completely. He was as glad to see him as he had ever been to see anybody.

But nothing of this showed in his face, hardly even the pleasure, as he shook hands with him, and said: "Halloa! Tricycled over? Afraid you've got rather warm."

A little later they were sitting together indoors, in grateful coolness, and there was a tumbler at Lord Crowborough's elbow, which, however, contained nothing alcoholic. No word had been said about the late dispute, but the two men were on their old terms. There was gratitude in the minds of both of them, but it did not show in their speech, which was level and unconcerned.

They talked first chiefly about the land, and the difficulties of landlords, with special reference to Mr. Henry Vincent, and whether he knew anything about the conditions of landowning at all or was only out to screw as much as possible out of the unfortunate landlord. The question admitted of some doubt, and there were instances to be brought forward in support of

either view. The matter that was engaging Colonel Eldridge's attention at this time, which also affected Lord Crowborough, was fully discussed, and Sir William's name came up in the course of discussion.

"I don't think he knows Vincent," said Colonel Eldridge; "but I suppose it would be easy for him to get an introduction. He has the whole business at his fingers' ends, and is keen to get it settled on the lines we've agreed upon."

"William's a very capable fellow," said Lord Crowborough. "If he throws himself into a question of this sort he's likely to get it put through—unless he puts their backs up."

"Why should he do that?"

"Well, I've a great admiration for William, and of course it has been a pleasure to me, knowing him ever since he was a boy, to see him climb up the ladder; he did extraordinary good work during the war; I've heard fellows say so. But I've met people who say that—well, that he does put people's backs up; that he's got a way of pushing his own ideas, and won't listen to anything against them. *I* don't say it, mind you."

"I think it's a very unfair accusation." Colonel Eldridge spoke warmly, and it delighted Lord Crowborough's heart to hear him. He even disposed himself to increase his indignation, because if they two could dispute upon a subject, as they always had done, and still remain fast friends, the larger dispute which had set them at enmity for a time must hold out no further danger.

"Well, that's what a number of people do say," he said dogmatically.

"Then you ought to contradict it if they say it to you. You know William."

"Oh, yes; and I like William. Nobody likes William more than I do, but he does set great store by his own opinion. It's a very good thing, if you're running a business or whatever it may be. Make up your mind what you want done and don't listen to the people who want it done differently. I dare say that's all it really means. Still, that's the general opinion of William, and there's no good shutting your eyes to it. Besides, you must have had experience of it yourself. You and William get on very well here—better than most brothers would, I dare say—but if William wants his own way I'll bet he takes it."

Lord Crowborough went rather beyond what he had grounds for saying here, for the sake of keeping up that mood of opposition which under the circumstances was gratifying to him, and was not prepared to give chapter and verse for his statement, as he was now requested to do.

"Has anybody told you that? What do you mean by it exactly? Is there any gossip about any dispute between William and me? It would annoy me very much if it were so."

"Oh, I don't say that, Edmund. You know best what's passing between you and William."

Colonel Eldridge jumped to conclusions. "It's damnably annoying how things get put about, and exaggerated," he said. "William and I are the best of

friends—always have been; but each of us has got his own way of looking at things and sometimes I don't say we don't have a little breeze, which makes no difference, or we shouldn't have chosen to live here close together for so many years."

"That's true enough; though of course it's William who has chosen to live here, for you can't help yourself."

"That's a foolish way of putting it. If I hadn't let William do what he liked with the Grange he wouldn't have wanted to live here; there wouldn't have been a house for him. It hasn't altogether suited me what he has done there, but I've let him do it because I like having him there."

"I suppose as he and his boy will come after you it doesn't so much matter what he does. I must say I shouldn't like, myself, to have a house of that sort growing up within a stone's throw of my own. I should think the Grange is as big as this house now, isn't it? And with William I should never be surprised to see it a good deal bigger. He's a fellow who likes spending his money and never seems satisfied with what he's got."

"There's some truth in what you say there, and as a matter of fact William and I have discussed that very question. He is making an addition to his garden there at this very minute. I dare say gossip has got about that I objected. Well, I did tell him that I thought it had gone quite far enough, and I shouldn't care for any further additions to be made."

"But you didn't stop him making this one?"

"Of course I didn't. I tell you that we understand one another thoroughly."

"There you are then. In the long run it comes to this, that he does exactly what he likes, which is what I said at the beginning. Still, William's a good fellow, and I know he's devoted to you; I've reason to know it. I should like to have a brother of that sort myself, but my brother Alfred has always been a nuisance to me, with his schemes for making enormous fortunes which never came off. It's different when your brother has a lot more money than you have. It's a very good thing, with all the burdens they're heaping on land nowadays, to have money brought into a property from outside. I suppose William could buy another place now, if he wanted to. I rather admire him for sticking to Hayslope, and if it amuses him to spend money on the Grange—well, it's because he likes it better than any other place."

Colonel Eldridge walked to the lodge gates with Lord Crowborough, who, mounted on his machine, suited his pace to his. They parted with much good will on either side, though with no more than a "Good-bye then for the present" to show it.

As he walked slowly back to the house, his heart was tender within him. It was almost worth while to have quarrelled with this old friend to have him back on the old terms again. But quarrelling was never worth while. He had come rather near to quarrelling with William over that affair of Barton's Close. He remembered with some compunction that he had spoken

angrily to his wife about it, and had written to William with more irritation than he now liked to think about; though he had shown in the latter part of his letter that the strength of his protest was not meant to go deeper than its expression. William had not yet answered his letter, as there would have been just time for him to do, which seemed to show that he had not taken it in offence; and the work of his garden was still going on. Colonel Eldridge had been inclined to take exception to that, although he was quite prepared for it to go on. It would have been better if William had written, saying that he had not understood his objection as serious, or something of that sort. It gave some colour to Crowborough's criticism of his way of pushing through his intentions. But it was true, what Crowborough had also said, that he loved Hayslope, and preferred to spend his money there rather than to make another place to his liking. Colonel Eldridge well knew that itch for improvement, and more improvement, and had acted upon it himself in the days when there had been money to spare for that sort of thing. He now thought of his protest as altogether exaggerated, and wished he hadn't made it. He was even inclined to be interested in the new garden that William had designed, and thought that he might be able to suggest some slight improvement in the details of the design when they came together on it, with the protest put aside and forgotten.

As he walked slowly along on the grass by the drive, with the wide acres of his park surrounding him, the sheep and cattle feeding peacefully, or lying in the

shade of the trees in which he took pride, he thought of himself as too apt to get annoyed about trifles.

It had not always been so. He was rigid in the demands he made upon others, but he thought about them kindly too—even his servants, whom he treated with old-fashioned stiffness, but whose welfare he would take pains to promote; much more the members of his family, in whose happiness his was bound up. He was the head of his house, and that must be recognized by everybody around him. But his rule was not exercised for his own exclusive benefit, and it had been his pride not to make it irksome by indulgence in transitory moods.

He was more at peace with himself at this moment than he had been since his troubles had come upon him. He saw that the trouble about money had loomed too large in his mind. There was enough money to live in the quiet way in which life had been going at Hayslope Hall, now for some time past. Cynthia was making herself happy in it; the children were happy. Why shouldn't he be? For the first time he caught a glimpse of a life lived more closely to the soil than it had come to be lived in such houses as his before the war. In the time of his great-grandfather, before a rich marriage had brought more money into the family, when a London house had been added to the country one, and the country house keyed up to a more elaborate style, Hayslope had been occupied for by far the greater part of the year, with a rare visit to London or Bath, or to the country houses of friends or relations. There were old letters and diaries in the library which told of the life

that had centred at Hayslope in those days. It was far simpler than the life that he and his had lived there before the war, but it seemed to have contented those who lived it.

They saw the seasons in and out, and each had its duties as well as pleasures. Guests would be entertained for weeks together, and live the daily life of their hosts; they seemed to see even more of their country neighbours, who lived in the same way as they did, with their recognized indoor and outdoor pursuits to fill the days, and their merry-makings in company, more eagerly looked forward to than the more frequent and elaborate amusements of today. The great charm of those days seemed in part actually to rest upon the difficulty of communication with the world outside, which concentrated the sweets of life upon the country home. And where the home was of the spacious and well-provided kind of Hayslope Hall, it must have been more cherished than if it were only resorted to for periods in the year, and even those periods broken up by frequent departures elsewhere.

Perhaps that old stay-at-home life of the country house would come back of compulsion, now that so many people were straitened in circumstances. It would be a good thing in many ways if it did; if the men who owned the land lived more closely to it, and identified themselves with those who were bound to it. That was a larger question; but there was no doubt that it could be made a satisfying life, if the necessary changes were squarely faced and accepted, and the life was arranged on a new basis. It came to his mind, with

a gratifying sense of discovery, that for him and his family that basis had already been found. It only remained to cease always casting back towards what had been before and could now be no longer. The best part remained, and life for him and his at Hayslope might be happy as it had ever been.

And the other deeper trouble was clearing too. He was glad that it had been mentioned between him and his old friend, whom for a time it had parted. At the last, as they had gone down the drive together, Lord Crowborough had said to him, quite simply: "We fell out about your poor boy, Edmund. I don't want to go away and leave him as something that must never be mentioned between us. It was a sad business, but for him it was wiped out when he fought well and was killed. He was your only son, and you've lost him. I've been more lucky in keeping mine."

That had put the finishing touch to their reconciliation. Hugo's lapses could be forgotten now, as they had been forgiven. They had been bad. For a long time after his death one trouble after another had come because of him, one revelation after another had been made. He had kept them nearly all to himself. Only his brother knew something of them, and he knew by no means all. His wife knew nothing. But an end seemed to have come to it at last. The burden on his mind was lifting, though it still lay heavy upon his purse, and would mean rigid economy for years to come.

How good William had been about it all! A real consolation and support in his troubles, and willing,

as he was able, to lift even the money burden of them from him. He blamed himself for having shown the irritability that had grown upon him, under the stress he had gone through, towards his brother. It was a poor return for what he had been so ready to do for him, to make a mountain out of that little molehill of irritation over Barton's Close. But William would not make too much of that. Perhaps the very best way to show him that it had been only a surface irritation, which did not affect the permanent tie of affection between them, would be to accept the help that he had so freely offered. Only pride had held him back, and that had prevented him from even acknowledging the generosity of the offer. He had simply put it aside. With that burden removed, scarcely any trouble would remain to him at all. He had already everything that was necessary to his own life for the remainder of his years. It was only upon Cynthia and the children that the economies which now had to be practised bore hardly. With this relief, which it was open to him to take at any time, he could give them more—if not all that he would have been able to give them but for the war. And he knew that William would be pleased if he were to go to him and say that he would accept his help. It would bind them together still more closely, for it would mean the merging of pride in affection.

He saw it all in that moment of enlightenment and softer feeling, and lingered on his way back to the house to taste the serener air which his vision brought him. His well-loved home would be a source of delight

to him once more, and no longer a source of anxiety, if he were to take the freedom that he could have at any time by a word of surrender. He looked about him before he entered the house, and the sunshine that steeped the wide spaces of the park seemed brighter and lovelier than before. There had lain a veil over the beauties of his home. But it only needed a gesture of his to have it removed altogether.

The parlour-maid met him as he went into the hall. "Mr. Coombe, Sir William's gardener, would like to see you, sir."

He went into his business room, where the man was waiting for him.

"I've had this telegram from Sir William, sir."

He handed over the pink sheet, and stood respectfully, cap in hand, while Colonel Eldridge read it. But his eyes rested upon him with an expression that had nothing pleasant in it.

"Stop work on new garden at once; pay outside labourers week's wages and dismiss them."

Colonel Eldridge's eyes, resting upon the paper, remained there longer than it required to take in its meaning. Coming immediately upon the thoughts with which his mind had been full, they gave him an unpleasant shock, the effect of which he could not entirely hide from the man who had administered it to him.

"There's a mistake," he said shortly. "I never intended that the work should be stopped."

Coombe did not take this up. "I've come to ask, sir," he said, "if anything can be done about the men

I got in to help with the work. I had a good deal of difficulty in finding them, and I told them it was likely to be at least a two months' job. Sir William said I could count it as that. They're mostly men who've been in the army—unemployed. There's dissatisfaction among them, and I—"

Colonel Eldridge had allowed him to go on because he wanted time to collect himself; but he now interrupted brusquely: "There's no need to make trouble at all. You can tell them there's been a mistake, and they can go on."

Coombe's eyes dropped. He was a youngish man, with a self-confident air, but with something secretive in his appearance and demeanour which seemed to contradict his quiet respectful manner. "I've given them notice, sir, on that telegram," he said. "I couldn't do anything else."

"You ought to have come and seen me first. It seems to me that you've been glad of the opportunity to make trouble."

It was a relief to him to speak like this. He disliked the man who stood before him with his sleek, respectful air, which he suspected to hide hostility that would show itself in insolence if it dared.

"I didn't come to see you about that, sir. My instructions are plain enough from that telegram, and I'd only got to carry them out."

"Then why do you come to me at all?"

"Because I thought you might be able to do something to keep these men from making trouble, sir, as Sir William isn't here. Only two of them belong to Hay-

slope—Jackson and Pegg. The others are lodging here. I've paid them their wages, as instructed, and with no work to do they're likely to get drinking and—"

"Oh, it's out of consideration for the good behaviour of the village you've come to me, is it?"

"Yes, sir. And because Sir William isn't here to deal with it."

Colonel Eldridge was getting more and more annoyed with him. But his training prevented his showing more annoyance with men of this class than he could make effectual. "Sir William is your master," he said, "and you are quite right to take your orders from him. But you know perfectly well that it's for me as a magistrate to deal with anything of that sort, whether he is here or not."

"Yes, sir, that's why I have come to you. I only meant that as the men are upset-like at Sir William's turning them off, he might have done something to quiet them."

There was no offence apparent in this. Colonel Eldridge thought for a moment. "The best thing to do is to tell them that there has been a mistake," he said. "They can go back to their work. You can tell them that on my authority, and I'll make it right with Sir William."

Coombe hesitated, and then came plump out with a refusal. "I can't do that, sir, without instructions from Sir William himself."

There was a moment's pause. Coombe kept his eyes on the ground, but his face became a shade paler. Colonel Eldridge looked at him as if he would have

annihilated him, and then turned away, and said quietly: "Very well, then. You can go."

Coombe threw a glance at him, seemed as if he were going to say something further, but went out without a word.

CHAPTER XI

A QUESTION OF LABOUR

So that was how William had taken his protest! No word to him, but this—it seemed like ill-tempered—order to put an end to the work. His anger was hot against Coombe, whom he accused in his mind of putting him in a hole for the sake of doing so, and then coming to see how he would take it. But towards William his feeling was more one of sorrow.

He had been giving him credit for generosity and kindly feeling. Surely it was unworthy of him to behave in that way, even if he had allowed himself to be unduly annoyed over the tone of the protest made to him. What must have been his attitude when he sent that telegram to his servant, and sent no word to his brother? He must have known that to dismiss his labourers in that way at a moment's notice would make trouble—trouble that would affect his brother who was on the spot. Yet he had left him to find out the high-handed action he had taken for himself. Why couldn't he have given him an opportunity of withdrawing, if he really thought that he had vetoed the undertaking, which had been in hand for a week? He *couldn't* have thought that; the letter written to him was not a prohibition.

What was to be done now? If that confounded fellow Coombe had come to him before dismissing the

men, he would have wired to William and put it all right. Yes, he would have done that, pocketing the hurt to his dignity; for he did recognize that he had given some cause for offence, though William had been in the wrong to take it in the way he had.

Was it too late to do it even now? It was he who had induced the word to be given that had stopped the work, and it was for him to give the word for it to go on. It was simply Coombe's insolence that had refused to take it from him. Coombe would find that he had overstepped the bounds; for he had for the time made it impossible to take the course that his master must wish to have taken. If matters were to be put right, it could only be by sending a long telegram to William. He began to formulate it in his mind. He must say that his letter had not meant that he wished the work to be stopped; he must make it plain that he wanted it to go on; he must say that Coombe had already dismissed the outside labour before telling him of the orders he had received, and had refused to take orders from him to re-engage the men. It would be best to get William to wire to Coombe to act upon Colonel Eldridge's authority until he came to Hayslope himself.

It would be a complete surrender on his part; but he was ready to make it. The mood in which he had entered the house still influenced him; if William chose to act in this way towards him, he would not accept it as an offence without giving him a chance to alter his attitude. They could have it out together when they met; that would be better than writing letters, which were apt to be misunderstood.

He had sat down at his writing-table to compose his message, when the maid came in and said that some men had called to see him. Who were they? One was Jackson, from the Brookside cottages, and another was Pegg, from Crouch Lane. There were two more whom she didn't know. She was told to show them in.

Jackson was an elderly man of good character well known to Colonel Eldridge, who had employed him himself for some years, until he had been obliged to reduce his labour bill. Pegg was a younger man, who had worked on various farms, and since the war, in which he had been wounded, had never remained long in one place, because his small pension, and the greatly increased wages for agricultural labour, had enabled him to indulge his taste for occasional spells of leisure. The other two men were younger still, and one of them wore a discoloured khaki tunic. Colonel Eldridge did not know either of them, but a shrewd glance told him that they were of the agricultural labourer class, probably smartened up a bit by their military service. They stood before him, Jackson slightly in advance.

"Well, Jackson! Well, Pegg! Hope your leg hasn't been giving you any more trouble. Who are these two?"

The man in the khaki tunic answered for himself, smartly. "Thomas Dell, Colonel, late of Second Battalion Downshire Regiment." The other followed suit. "Albert Chambers, Colonel, late of Army Service Corps."

He asked them a few questions about themselves. They had served their country; the soldier in him must

pay tribute to that first of all. They could be seen expanding in modest pride, as they exercised the mode of address they had learnt in the orderly room, standing before their officers as they now stood before him. He approved of them. Men who had served unwillingly in the army and taken their discharge would not have answered him in that way.

"Well, what is it you want? Jackson!"

"We were took on at Mr. William's, beg your pardon, Sir William's, sir, and now we're turned off. It don't seem hardly fair, and we thought we'd come to you about it."

"How were you taken on? By the week?"

"Yes, sir. But—"

"Coombe has just been here, and told me that you've had a week's wages instead of notice. So there's nothing unfair in it."

"Well, sir, we were told that it would be a two month's job. That's what Coombe told us."

"Coombe took you on, I suppose; not Sir William?"

"Yes, sir. It was like this—"

"I've just heard all about it from Coombe. There has been a mistake. When you came in, I was just about to telegraph to Sir William. What you'd better do is to wait till I get an answer, and I've no doubt that to-morrow you'll be going on where you left off. You'll have had a day's holiday at full pay, and you won't have anything to grumble at, eh?"

He said this with a smile. He liked old Jackson, and had often stopped to have a word with him, when he had been employed on estate work, mending a fence, clearing

a drain, or whatever job it might be that had to do with the land on which he had worked since boyhood. He was full of homely wisdom; a true son of the soil, with few desires that were not connected with it. Such men appeal to the fatherly instinct that is born in the best type of landowner towards those dependent on him. Their simplicity must be respected; their reliance upon the justice of their "betters" must be met by the most careful consideration of their troubles.

Old Jackson hesitated. "Well, sir," he said, "begging your pardon, we're not wishful to take on work again under Coombe. Sir William, he'd always treat us right, same as you would, if he wasn't too occupied to look after things himself, as I've told these others who've been working along of us. Pegg'll bear me out there."

Pegg bore him out, with a mumble of acquiescence, and Colonel Eldridge waited for him to go on.

"Coombe don't come from these parts," said old Jackson, and came to a stop.

"That's nothing against him, if he acts as he should. What's the complaint against him?"

But Jackson had come to the end of his powers of expression. He could only repeat: "He don't come from these parts."

Dell, in the khaki jacket, took up the tale. "He's desirous of making mischief, sir. We were told, after you came down the other morning, that there'd be trouble about the work we were doing, and if we were turned off of a good job we'd better look to you for another one."

Colonel Eldridge had not expected anything of this sort. But he was sitting in the seat of justice now, and the bearing of such a statement on himself must wait for consideration until later.

"Who was that said to? Tell me the exact words that were said."

Old Jackson found his tongue again. "That's how it was, sir," he said. "There was me and Pegg heard it, and Dell, and another who ain't here. I up and said myself that he'd no call to talk like that of you, and whatever Mr. William done with his land you'd stand by."

"You were quite right there, of course. Was there anything more said, or only just that speech?"

"He told me to go on with my work and not sauce him back, or I could lay down my tools and take myself off. I ain't used to being talked to in that way, sir; and Coombe don't belong to these parts."

"He told Warner, one of the other men took on, sir, that you didn't like Sir William having more money nor what you've got—begging your pardon for reporting his true words—and that if you could stop the work what we was engaged on, you'd do it."

This was from Chambers, the other ex-soldier, and Dell added: "That's right, sir. And he said we could see for ourselves that you were looking ugly about it, and meant mischief."

"That's enough. I don't want to hear any more insolent speeches. If you've just come to repeat that sort of thing to me, I'd rather you had let it alone. Jackson and Pegg are my tenants, though neither of

them work for me. I dare say they wouldn't like to stand by and let that go on without speaking up. But it would have been better to report it to Sir William, instead of to me. I don't see what it has to do with you two at all."

They showed some surprise at that, for his anger was plain to see, and his gaze was directed straight at them. "I've told you," he said to Jackson, "that I was on the point of wiring to Sir William to ask him to give instructions to Coombe to proceed with the work. That would have meant taking you all on again. If you don't want to be taken on, I can't do anything more for you."

Old Jackson seemed to have nothing further to say, and the two ex-soldiers were still under the influence of the rebuke administered to them. It was Pegg who spoke, with a preparatory clearing of the throat. "Jackson said you was thinking of mending the road through the park, sir."

"Mending the road!"

"It wants doing," said Jackson, speaking now in quite a different tone, as an expert, whose word carries weight. "It wants doing bad. Put it off any longer and 'twill mean laying a new foundation here and there, and steam-rolling and all, when take it in time and a bit of metal will serve. There's a hole by the three oaks that never ought to been allowed to get so. You can maybe patch it up to-day, but I wouldn't answer for what you could do with it to-morrow. Nothing's been done to the road for a matter of five years or more."

"You may call it six," said Colonel Eldridge. "It was mended last in the winter before the war, and it was mostly your doing, Jackson."

"Yes, sir. And there was a tidy bit of metal got out of the lower quarry what we didn't use all of. You'd only have to break it up and lead it; and lead some gravel to put on it. 'Tis true that I did say to Pegg and these two that us four 'ud make a good job of it in four weeks, maybe five—I wouldn't undertake not to make a tidy job of it in less. Put it off and it'll take longer."

Colonel Eldridge sat considering, his eyes on the papers in front of him. "What about the other two who were taken on at the Grange?" he asked.

"They've gone off, sir," said Dell. "They didn't like the job, and wouldn't have stayed anyhow."

"They *have* gone off? They're not hanging about the village?"

"No, sir. They took their money, and went off by train to Southampton where they belong to the docks."

"Where are you two lodging?"

They told him, and he made no comment, except to say: "If I take you on, you'll have to work under Jackson, and you'll have to keep quiet in the village. A glass or two at the inn I don't mind, but we never have any trouble with drink at Hayslope, and I wouldn't put up with it."

Chambers looked scandalized, and asserted himself to be a teetotaller. Dell said: "I'm a respectable man, Colonel, and if anybody's been putting it about that

I'm otherwise that man's a liar, begging your pardon for the language."

"Very well. I accept what you say. I'll take the four of you on from to-morrow, by the week. What wages were you getting at the Grange?"

They told him, and he said they were too high. "You know that, Jackson. Wages have gone up enormously. I don't grudge them to men like you, who do your work as it ought to be done. But I'm not going to pay more than the current rate. If Coombe took you on at the Grange at the rate you say, he ought not to have done it."

They expressed themselves in their various ways as satisfied with what he offered them, and old Jackson said: "Who am I to take my orders from, sir, now Bridger has gone?"

"You'll take them from me. I'm my own bailiff now. Meet me in half an hour at the three oaks, and I'll settle with you what's to be done."

He wanted a little time for consideration, and when the men had filed out of the room and left him alone, he rose and walked up and down, as his habit was when he had to think anything out.

He wanted to be quite sure that he had done right. The cost of these repairs would be heavy, but the state of the drive would not admit of much further delay, as old Jackson had said, unless it were to become almost impassable here and there, and involve a larger expenditure later on. He had been ashamed of it only half an hour before, when Lord Crowborough had turned off on to the grass of the park to escape the worst place, and

shown, by making no comment on it, that he knew why it had been left as it was. He was rather relieved at having had his hand forced about it, for it didn't do to shirk making necessary repairs out of unwillingness to spend money on them at the right time. Only bad landlords did that, and they suffered for it in the long run. The cost would be inconvenient at this moment, but it could be met. Jackson would do the work thoroughly, and he was glad to have the old fellow back in his employ. It might even be worth while to keep him on, for now that he had got rid of his bailiff there was nobody to whom he could delegate any overseeing, and he was more tied than he wanted to be. Pegg was a bit of a rolling stone, but would keep up to the mark as long as the job lasted. The other two seemed good sort of men, and would probably do as well as any.

All that was satisfactory enough; but it wanted thinking about as it affected his relations with William.

The idea of wiring to him in the terms he had intended must be given up. That had settled itself, for the extra labour he had employed was no longer available. Two of the men had gone off, and the other four had refused to continue with it. That was Coombe's fault, without any question. He had always suspected that fellow of being a mischief-maker, and now he stood revealed. The report with which he had come to him had been immediately proved to be absolutely groundless. Of the men of whom he had professed to be so suspicious that it was necessary to come and give a warning—for the good name of the village—two belonged to it—which

he didn't—and were well known, two had already left it, and from the other two there was nothing to fear. The impudent readiness with which he had turned the few questions of the other morning into a mischievous attack showed him for what he was. Colonel Eldridge hardly felt indignation on account of it. The man had given himself away, and was as good as done with. Whatever their differences, William would never keep in his employ a man who had misbehaved in that way.

Coombe was so patently the fount and origin of the break-up that had come upon William's plans that it was a little difficult to go back to what had given him his handle. When he turned his mind to it, he experienced a droop of spirit. It was his protest that had started the trouble, and he had no inclination to shirk that fact, though it was also true that if William had not received it in the spirit he had, no harm would have been done. He had some effort to put himself in William's place, and did arrive at the conclusion that he had probably not received his letter until his return from his visit that morning, and that he *had* probably written in answer to it, which answer he would receive the next morning. That softened the effect of his peremptory order, but by no means justified it; for unless he had intended to show his annoyance by it, he would surely have sent him a wire at the same time.

The result of his cogitations was that nothing could be done then to mend the matter. He must wait to see if there was a letter from William, and, whether there was or not, it would be better to write no more letters, but to wait further until William came down on Friday

evening, which he usually did. The garden should be made somehow, with another than Coombe to direct it. He wanted to see the garden made now, almost as much as William did.

He went out and made the arrangements with old Jackson, and then again returned to the house, slowly, and with very different thoughts from those which had borne him company on the same road an hour before. He did not want to think any more about the unpleasantness that had come upon him. No doubt it would work itself out, but he did not feel that he was free of it yet. And the vision of the larger freedom that had come to him had faded. He was in no mind now to go to William and ask him for the money that would settle all his difficulties.

After supper, which had taken the place of dinner at Hayslope Hall on these long summer evenings, he walked with his wife in the garden, and told her of what had happened.

She was more disturbed than he had been over William's telegram to Coombe, and his failure to communicate at the same time with him. "You're *sure* you didn't actually forbid him to go on?" she asked.

Yes, he was quite sure; but in answer to a further question he could not declare with such certainty that he had not written in a way that could arouse annoyance. "I'm afraid I did express myself rather strongly," he admitted. "But I always have said straight out what I meant to William, and he has never taken it like this. Besides, my impression is that I showed him, in what I wrote afterwards, that I didn't

mean it seriously—or not so seriously as all that. I intended to, anyhow."

"Ah!" she sighed. "You ought to have shown me the letter before you sent it. I could have told you whether it was right or not. I wonder if Eleanor saw this telegram before William sent it! I'm sure to hear from her to-morrow, and I think you are sure to hear from William."

"William ought not to have done it," he said, in a tone of finality. "I can't think that he would have behaved like this a few years ago."

"Oh, my dear, of course he wouldn't."

"Why do you say that?" he asked in some surprise.

"It's quite plain, isn't it? William was nobody much then, compared to you. Now he is a notable, and expects to be treated as such."

"He has never shown that he expected us to treat him any differently."

"Oh, as long as we keep our places, and don't presume."

He did not smile at this. "I didn't know you felt like that about him," he said. "You don't about Eleanor, do you?"

"No. Eleanor has a more level head. I haven't really much fault to find with William either. I was only laughing at him. One does laugh at people who go up in the world, and show themselves so delighted with it, doesn't one? It's the best way to take them, especially if you're not going up in the world yourself. Or perhaps it isn't the best way. I'm not sure. Perhaps it shows you're a little jealous of them. But I'm

certainly not jealous of Eleanor, and I'm sure you're not jealous of William. Poor William! I'm a little sorry for him."

"Sorry for him!"

"Ye—es. His success hasn't improved him. I don't like him as well as I did, and of course I'm sorry for the people I don't like, just as I'm rather inclined to envy the people I do like. I'll tell you what I think about all this bother. I don't believe William has the slightest intention of giving up his garden. He'll expect you to be overcome with remorse at having rebuked him, and beg him to go on. What does it matter to him, paying six men a week's wages, with no work done for it? And there's no hurry, you know. They weren't going to plant in any case until October. There will be plenty of time to get new men to work at it, and get it finished in time."

"Do you really think that is what he has in his mind? Something of the same sort occurred to me, but I don't want to think such a thing."

"Well, dear, you had much better follow your own ideas about it than mine. You can't except a woman to take the broad view of something that touches her that a man can. I dare say you're more likely to be right about William than I am. You have always treated him with great forbearance, and until now you have kept good friends with him."

"You do think that—that I've treated him with forbearance?"

She stopped, and with a light laugh, looking up at him, put her hands on his shoulders. "My dear kind-

hearted conscientious old man!" she said. "I'll tell you what I think. If you don't make a stand now, William will very soon be everything at Hayslope, and you will be nothing."

CHAPTER XII

NEW IDEAS

Summer rain was falling heavily, and a little party was gathered together in the schoolroom at Hayslope Hall. This was a large room on the second floor, with windows looking two ways, one on to the park, two on to the garden and the woods beyond. There was a glimpse from these windows, through the trees, of some of the roofs and chimneys of the Grange on its opposite hill; and across the park the tower of the church and part of the village could be seen, with a wide stretch of country beyond, and Pershore Castle some miles away, to give accent to a characteristic scene of wooded undulating country, not yet tainted with the blight of industrialism. It was sometimes said that this old nursery, now the schoolroom, was the nicest room in the house. There were no such views to be obtained from those of the lower floors, but the views did not make up the whole of its charm. It had that of all rooms in an old house that have been devoted to the use of children. Changes in furniture or decoration come to them slowly. Everything that they contain has made its indelible impression upon the minds of those who have occupied them in the most receptive years of their lives, and are woven into the texture of their memories. They have witnessed the troubles of childhood; but these fade away and are forgotten, or

remembered only as part of the immensely significant and varied experiences of that age, merging into the rest and carry no sting. They do not associate themselves with graver troubles, and to those who came back to them they seem to be a refuge from all the ills of life, so innocent are the pursuits with which they are connected, so free are they from the cares and forebodings associated with other familiar rooms.

This note of freedom and innocence was grateful to Fred Comfrey, who had been welcomed to this room by Alice and Isabelle, its present occupants, Miss Baldwin acquiescing. Fred had "taken notice" of Alice and Isabelle, for reasons not difficult to gauge. He had never cared much for children, and one would have said that he had no power to interest or attract them. But his absence of art probably recommended him to these two, who would not have liked him so well if he had been either jocular or condescending with them. He treated them in the same way as he treated Judith, who was grown up. Judith did not like him, but they did, and presently began to make use of him.

On this wet Saturday morning, when there were no lessons to be done, they were engaged in restoring an old toy theatre, which had once belonged to Hugo. Alice had composed a play, which was to be acted by figures designed by Isabelle. These had been cut out with a fretsaw, and coloured; and together they had glued them on to their stands. But the theatre itself, after having lain hidden for years in a lumber room, needed more serious repair than came within their scope. Fred was a godsend in this predicament, and

was doing all that was necessary, with a capable hand. Pamela and the children were helping, arrayed all three in blue overalls, which as worn by Pamela seemed to Fred to be the most attractive costume that a girl could wear. Miss Baldwin sat apart, busy with needlework on her own account. Her presence had no effect upon the flow of chatter. She hardly came into the children's lives except as a reminder and concomitant of duty, and they were well accustomed to ignore her when amusement was on foot. Judith also sat apart, curled up on the deep shabby old sofa with a book, and oblivious to everything around her. Her enjoyment probably was enhanced by the sense of being in company, or she would have betaken herself elsewhere.

Miss Baldwin, however, was far more alive to what was going on than anybody there could have imagined. Unnoticed, she marked every look and every word. For romance was going on, here under her very eyes, and she could fit it all in to her ideas of how a story of romance should run.

There was the sweet young girl brought up in the seclusion of her country home, untouched as yet by the wand of love; there were two men eager to break the spell that held her; and one of them was a lord. Pamela had no idea how much Miss Baldwin, prim and plain and scholastic, admired her. Judith she had taught for a year, and Judith was just a schoolgirl to her, like any other, although she was now grown up, and as beautiful in her way as Pamela. Pamela seemed to her the very type of well-born maidenhood, beautiful and gay, and kind and gentle in her speech and

in her ways. She could weave stories around her, and longed for the time when the suitors should come thronging. Upon Norman's first appearance she had cast him for the part of hero, and well he would have filled it but for the fact of his cousinhood. He was young and gay and handsome too, and a soldier. But she soon saw him as taking the place towards the girls of their brother, who had been killed. He might come into the story later, but not as a suitor.

Two suitors had now appeared on the field, almost at the same time. It might have been thought that Miss Baldwin would have favoured the lord, who, upon his first appearance at Hayslope, had actually ridden over on a horse, from his battlemented castle—or rather from his father's, which came to the same thing. But Horsham did not conform to her ideas of a lord, in spite of the horse and the castle. His looks were not on a level with Pamela's, and though he had youth on his side, she could not describe it to herself as gallant youth. He had addressed himself to her when he had first lunched at Hayslope, and with courtesy; but it had been to ask her whether she thought Edinburgh or Liverpool had the more easterly aspect. Suspecting some sort of catch, she had replied coldly in favour of Edinburgh, and it had appeared that she was wrong. That didn't matter; but the question seemed unworthy of one of his rank. She would rather that he had ignored her, as the meek silent drudge, in the family but not of it, and beneath the notice of such as he. He seemed to be well-meaning and well-educated —his conversation had been largely geographical. But

Miss Baldwin was not content in a lord with qualities that would have graced a schoolmaster.

Did she then favour the suit of Fred Comfrey, whose desires lay open to her? She did. He was a son of the vicarage, who had gone out into the world at an early age to carve his own way in it; and from what she had heard, he seemed to some extent already to have carved it. He had given up everything to fight in the war, had fought like a hero—as far as she knew—and received honourable wounds, from which he had not yet entirely recovered. His square ugly face and his broad frame spelt POWER. If he was not quite the strong silent man—for he talkéd a good deal, and rather nervously—he might become so, under trial. He was still young, though he had done so much. He paid attention to her, and rather embarrassed her by so doing; for she did not wish to be talked to in company, having little to say in reply. But his reasons for doing so were obvious, and she approved of them. If she could have brought herself to tell him that she saw everything and wished him well, her tongue might have been unloosed in a way to surprise him. But that, of course, was impossible, though she sometimes played with the idea of the unconsidered governess putting everything right by a bashfully whispered word to the ever-after-grateful hero.

She did more than play with the idea of things going wrong. She expected and longed for it, but only as a preliminary to their eventually going right. Nobody but herself seemed yet to have awakened to what was going on. When they did, who could doubt that it

would be the lord who would be preferred by the parents, and the other who would be sent about his business—perhaps with contumely? She rather hoped with contumely, for then he would have an opportunity of showing what stuff he was made of, and it would be so much more interesting. Oh, if only Pamela could have her eyes opened before the discovery came! If he had made no impression on her, she would, of course, accept his dismissal at the hands of her parents with complete equanimity, and the story would simply fizzle out.

That was why Miss Baldwin watched the pair of them so closely, as with their heads almost touching they bent over their common task, and the talk flowed, with never a ripple that she could discern to disturb it, and give it a deeper meaning. There were signs in *his* speech and looks of what she wanted to see, but she had got used to that by this time. It was like carrying on for too long with a chapter that had already told its tale. She wanted the next one, in which Pamela was to show the signs. Sometimes she thought it might be beginning; but it never did. Pamela had not even seen yet what had become so plain. Her friendliness could not be misunderstood. There was no hint of self-consciousness in it; or if Miss Baldwin sometimes thought that she caught a hint of her awakening, it soon died away again. She was forced to believe that Pamela was as yet fancy-free.

But here, unexpectedly, was a factor introduced into the story of which she had lost sight. Sitting at the window, and looking up just at the right moment, she

saw Norman come out into the garden, from the wood which lay between the Hall and the Grange. He was buttoned up at neck and sleeves in a rain-coat, and the brim of his soft felt hat was pulled down over his face. He carried an ash sapling, which he was swishing about as if he were conducting an orchestra. In imagination he may have been, for he was a musical enthusiast. He was walking very fast, and there was something in his appearance that appealed to Miss Baldwin's imagination, which within its limits had the same artistic enthusiasm as his. For a moment he presented himself to her as the third suitor, whose success—after vicissitudes to be undergone—was finally to be hoped for. But the idea was rejected as soon as formulated. There was no story in it, for it was difficult to see where the vicissitudes were to come from. Besides, the cousinship held. She could not see Norman and Pamela as lovers.

There was material for Miss Baldwin in Norman's first meeting with Fred. He came into the room with a breezy, high-spirited air, which changed completely as he caught sight of Fred sitting at the table, intent upon his task, with Pamela's head very near to his, and Isabelle's still nearer. Only she saw this; for he had burst into the room unannounced, and by the time heads were raised his expression had changed again, though not to that of eager pleasure with which he had entered. He shook hands with Fred, if not cordially, with no marked hostility, and said a few words to him before answering the inquiries that were showered upon him by the others.

No, they had not meant to come down to the Grange this week. His father had gone to stay with some old duffer who wanted to talk politics with him. His mother had been going too, but wasn't very fit. He had turned up the night before in London, and persuaded her to let him motor her down. He had come to ask if Aunt Cynthia and Pamela would come to luncheon.

Miss Baldwin's eyes were on the strong silent man-to-be during this passage. He did not quite fulfil her expectations, for he looked almost as if he were ashamed at having been caught. This might mean that he knew he would have to face opposition from Pamela's cousin, which Miss Baldwin would not have expected him to divine at so early a stage. But she would have liked him to hold up his head higher, while for the moment he was apart from the centre of the scene. The silence was there, but not the strength; he looked merely awkward.

She waited until attention was upon him again. Norman's first look of dislike had impressed her, and contained promise of drama. It looked as if these two had crossed each others' path before; but that could hardly be, for she knew by this time that Fred had been carving his way to fortune in foreign climes and had not for years visited the home-land. They had met in boyhood; but any differences of opinion they might have had then would not have amounted to crossing each other's path. She came, somewhat reluctantly, to the conclusion that there was nothing more in it than what she expected; dislike on the part of Pamela's

relations to the idea of her being wooed by the vicar's self-made son, when once they woke up to the possibility of such a thing. Norman had apparently woke up to it instantly. Of that she gained assurance, as he talked to Fred about his experiences in the war, and other matters, in a way unlike his usual open sociable manner of speech, which showed plainly, to her at least, that dislike was behind it all. It seemed to her that Pamela was aware of the hostility, and deprecated it. She helped Fred, and pointed for him the modesty of some of his replies. She even seemed to suggest that he should be included in the invitation to luncheon; but Norman did not respond to the suggestion, and when she went off to find her mother he went with her, as if he did not want to be left with Fred; and when he said good-bye to him he made no proposal of their meeting again. His attitude, indeed, was so significant that even the children noticed it. For Alice said: "Norman seems to have something on his mind. I don't think he's liking us as much as usual." And Isabelle added: "Perhaps he's in love. It takes them like that, doesn't it, Miss Baldwin?"

Miss Baldwin made a suitable reply, to the effect that Isabelle should go on with what she was doing, and not ask silly questions. The children, of course, knew of her taste for fiction, but were not enough interested in her to make it the subject of more than an occasional allusion of this sort, with which she could cope by assuming her rôle of instructress. Fred took his departure soon afterwards. Perhaps he had some hope of coming across Pamela in another part of the

house. Perhaps he was too dispirited to go on with what he was doing with Pamela gone. There was a marked drop in his air of contentment during the short time he remained, and he did not respond to the chatter of the children with his usual complacency. Oh, no doubt the affair was in train of development now, and a new chapter might fairly be said to have begun.

It was not until after luncheon that Norman and Pamela were alone together. Rain was still falling, and they went into the billiard-room, but did not immediately begin the game which they usually played on such occasions. Norman had recovered his spirits, never for very long obscured, but his first words, as he shut the door behind him, were: "I say, old girl, it was rather a shock to find that fellow making himself at home with you this morning. I don't think you ought to accept him into the bosom of the family in that way. Really, he's a most awful outsider."

Perhaps Pamela had been giving the subject some consideration, in preparation for some such attack. She affected no surprise at it, but said: "I know you don't like him. I'm not particularly anxious that you should, or I might have been annoyed at the way you treated him this morning. But do leave us alone about him. We're going to be nice to him as long as he stays here. Father and mother want us to, for one thing. Anyhow, it's nothing to do with you. Now tell me about Margaret."

"Oh, I'll tell you all about Margaret when the time comes. It's partly what I came down for. But, Pam dear, do take a word of warning about that fellow.

It's easy enough to see that he's trying to worm himself in. It isn't exactly his technique, you know, to play the kind elder to children. Of course it's you he's after. Excuse my speaking plainly, but I do know about these things. It's calculated to make one sick—the idea of a creature like that making up to you."

She replied, with slightly heightened colour, but in the same level kindly tone: "It's awfully sweet of you to be so careful about me, Norman dear; but your vivid imagination is running away with you. There's nothing of that sort going on, and if there were I could deal with it perfectly well myself."

"No, you couldn't," he said firmly. "You think you know a lot, but you know very little. You don't know anything at all about a man of that sort, thank goodness! Of course I know that you're ratty at my talking about it at all, although you pretend not to be. So I won't go on. I've given you my warning, and if you're wise you'll pay attention to it."

"It's very sweet of you, as I said before; and I'm not in the least ratty. And if I don't know something about all that sort of thing by this time, I ought to, for you never talk about anything else. Now talk about it in connection with Margaret."

"Ah! You *are* ratty. But you can't make *me*. If my wisdom and self-control weren't equal to my perceptions, supported by a life-time experience, I should reiterate my warnings. As it is, I stop short—like that!"

He gave a snap of his fingers, and stood staring at her, his hand lifted, until she was obliged to laugh.

"You're a donkey," she said. "Now tell me about Margaret."

"Ah! Margaret!" he said. "You observe that I speak with a lingering intonation, Pam. It represents the tender emotion which stirs my bosom whenever I utter that sweet name. But unfortunately, I haven't seen her again; I have only been feeding on her memory—her sweet and ducal memory."

"Oh, then that means that you have seen somebody else. I did think that it meant something at last—not a great deal, but still something. Who has cut her out?"

"Pam dear, how crude you are! I should say coarse if it were anyone else. Cut her out! As if anybody could cut her out! No, she remains the one and only. Margaret! Her very name is music. But I told you, didn't I, that her father was a Duke?"

"Oh, yes, you told me that. It is one of the few things I know about her—and that she's a sort of highbrow, though not devoid of good looks."

"A highbrow! Sometimes I think you've no soul, Pam. Margaret is *not* a highbrow, any more than you are. But she is the daughter of a Duke; and it has occurred to me that in pursuing the daughter of a Duke I may be laying myself open to misconceptions."

"Yes, I see. But I wish you'd come to the point and tell me who the other girl is."

They had been standing by the window. Norman turned away, and said in a different voice: "Let's sit down. I want to tell you something."

They sat on a sofa by the fireplace. Norman lit a

pipe. "I say, Pam, he said, "did you ever think of Dad as a sort of millionaire?"

"What a funny question! What is a *sort* of millionaire? I suppose I've always known that he has plenty of money. What is the bearing of the question?"

"You know I've been having a week's sail on the Broads, with a couple of pals. We've had a topping time. I'll tell you about it later on. One of the fellows was Dick Baskerville, a son of Lord Ledbury, who's Minister for something or other—I've forgotten what—and the other was Eric Blundell, one of those blokes who seems to know everybody and everything that's going on. They were both at Eton with me, and both in the regiment. Dick's in it still, and Eric's at Cambridge. We'd always chaffed each other about our respective anginas, and . . ."

"What do you mean—anginas?"

"Heart troubles. Both of them had tumbled to Margaret, and brought her up against me. I didn't deny the soft impeachers; in fact I was rather pleased at it. When your time comes, you'll see how that works out. But by and by they began to talk about it as if it were something quite serious."

"Sweet youths!" interpolated Pam.

"Oh, there was nothing wrong with them. I mean that they began to talk about marriage, and the right sort of match, and all that sort of thing."

"I should have thought you'd have been rather pleased with that."

"Why? Because she's the daughter of a Duke?

I shouldn't have thought *you* would have taken that line."

He looked pained. "I don't, really," said Pam soothingly. "Did they?"

"Oh, not in any way that you could object to. I mean they wouldn't have thought I was making up to her because of that. But—well, the long and the short of it is that I seemed to present myself to their minds as the son of a man who's so rich that I can afford to make up to anybody. That's what's disturbing me."

She bent her mind to it. "Really, I don't quite see," she said, with sympathy. "If it does come to that—that you want to marry her—wouldn't it make it easier?"

"I suppose I should be glad that money didn't stand in the way. But I don't quite like it, all the same. Dad seems to be quite well known, as a man who has made pots of money, and may be made a peer himself, or anything he likes—not because of his money—I don't mean that exactly—but because he has made himself so useful to them. What I didn't like was the sort of suggestion that he made a pot during the war. I know he didn't, and I told them so. Of course they said that they had never imagined anything of that kind—seemed shocked at the very idea. But I'm pretty certain that the idea is going about, and I don't like it a bit. Anyhow, *I'm* not going to exhibit myself as a joyous young bounder who thinks he can do anything he likes because he's the son of a rich man. I don't believe Dad *is* as rich as all that, and I told them so. I said I supposed they were leading up to asking me

to back bills for them. We left it on that note. But it's rather disturbing, isn't it?"

"Not very, Norman dear. I shouldn't let it worry you. *I* know perfectly well that you'd be just the same if Uncle Bill were as poor as a church mouse; and everybody would be just as pleased to see you."

"Dear old girl! *You* know that I shouldn't found myself on money; but everybody doesn't. I shall have to be a bit careful, if it's really like that. I think I shall put it to Dad myself. He's not like that, either. He likes work, and he's made a big success of it because he's so clever, and sound. It's hard luck if people have got hold of a wrong idea of him."

"You're always telling me that I know nothing; but I do know as much as that—that rich people are apt to be misunderstood. Still, *we* know him, so what does it matter? What is the bearing of it all upon Margaret?"

"The bearing of it on Margaret—name that melts my very heart-strings—is that I shall go slow for a time, and see how things turn out. If she weren't a Duke's daughter, I should let myself rip. As it is, I'm not so sure."

CHAPTER XIII

DISCUSSION

Lady Eldridge was as direct in her speech and her ways as any woman could be. Yet it did not seem possible to her to embark directly upon the subject of which her mind was full, when Norman and Pamela had gone off, and she and her sister-in-law were left alone together. Clothes were the topic which Mrs. Eldridge seemed eager to discuss, and as if it were the one upon which she had only been waiting to unburden herself. Lady Eldridge allowed herself to drift with the stream, until some landing-place should appear upon which she could set her foot. She was used to humouring Cynthia in this way, who was not easily diverted from any subject in which she was interested, though she would pursue it with many amusing twists and turns, and never made her longest speeches tiresome to listen to. She seemed to be full of spirit this afternoon, and made Lady Eldridge laugh more than once, though she was increasingly anxious to come to terms with her upon the question which must surely be disturbing them both equally.

For nothing had been heard from Hayslope in answer to William's letter. Coombe had written to say that he had paid off the labour, according to instructions, and that was all. She had summoned him that morning on her arrival at the Grange, about plants and flowers

for the house, and he had volunteered the information that most of the men who had been working at the garden had been taken on by Colonel Eldridge. This had given her an unpleasant shock, but she had made no comment upon it to him, nor encouraged him to any further disclosures. She had divined from his manner that he was hostile to her brother-in-law, and did not want to hear about what had been happening from him first; nor to let him see that she knew nothing.

At last she found an opening. "Cynthia dear," she said, "I must talk to you about the garden. You must remember that I know nothing yet of what has happened since William wrote."

Mrs. Eldridge did not lay aside the light manner in which she had been carrying on the conversation. "Well, dear," she said, "if you must talk about it I suppose you must. But it's such a tiresome business altogether that I should have thought it would have been better to leave it to the two men. If they are going to fall out about such a thing, I'm sure you and I needn't; and of course they will come together again."

Lady Eldridge thought for a moment. "Of *course* you and I shan't fall out about it," she said with decision. "But it must have gone a good deal farther than it ought to have done for you to think of such a thing. Why didn't Edmund answer William's letter?"

"Well, there's no difficulty in answering that. His first letter to William seemed to have been so misunderstood that he thought it better not to write any more, but to wait till he came down. Of course he

didn't know that he wasn't coming down this week, or perhaps he *would* have written. I think he was quite right, you know. I advised him myself, when he wrote first of all, not to show irritation. I'm afraid the poor old darling must have done so, and unfortunately he didn't show me what he had written before he sent it. Oh, I think it's so much better *not* to write letters which may be misunderstood. I didn't answer yours for the same reason, though I know *you* wouldn't misunderstand. Well, perhaps that wasn't *quite* the reason. I didn't want to mix myself up in it."

Lady Eldridge's spirits had lightened during the course of this speech. "I'm so glad it was like that," she said. "I thought it must have been something of the sort. But do you mean that Edmund didn't want William to give up making the garden?"

"Of course he didn't. He only thought he ought to have been consulted first. I'm bound to say I thought he had been, and I told him so. I was as much in it as you were, in a sort of way. I was interested in the scheme, as you know. *I* certainly didn't want it given up, and I was disappointed when William threw it all over."

"But—Edmund did object, you know; and pretty strongly. I saw his letter. William felt that he couldn't go on, in the face of that."

"Ye—es. But Edmund would have told him that he hadn't meant him to stop, if he had been given the chance. Men do act hastily when they are a little upset with one another; but it was a pity that William took up the attitude he did, I think. With just a *little*

consideration for Edmund's feelings the trouble would have blown over entirely. Now I'm afraid there is quite a lot to put straight, and it has tried Edmund very much."

"I don't understand it, Cynthia. William wired at once to have the work stopped, according to what he thought were Edmund's wishes. It was a good deal to do under the circumstances, and what could he have done more? Surely, Edmund could easily have put it all straight by wiring back that William had misunderstood him, and then—"

"Wiring back, dear! William didn't wire to Edmund. He took no notice of Edmund at all. The first Edmund knew was that Coombe came to tell him that he had dismissed the men. After that what *could* he do?"

"What he seems to have done was to take the men on himself."

"I'm rather sorry he did do that, because of course he can't afford it, and it will only add to his worries, poor dear! Still, there they were dismissed at a moment's notice, in a fit of temper, you might say, and—"

"Oh, *no*, Cynthia. It wasn't so. You mustn't say that."

"My dear child, we must be reasonable on both sides if we are to talk it over at all. I've admitted quite frankly on my part that Edmund was hasty in what he first wrote to William, and you ought to admit on yours that William acted in the same way."

"But, Cynthia dear, I *know*. William *was* annoyed,

but after he had talked it all over he got rid of his annoyance. I *know* that it had passed when he wrote."

"Very well, then. But if that is so you must admit that he took an unfortunate way of showing it. To dismiss the men off-hand by wire, to let Edmund hear of it first from Coombe, and then—"

"I do admit that that was unfortunate. I'm quite sure that it never occurred to him—it didn't to me—that it would look as if—"

"And then his letter the next morning! That put Edmund's back up more than anything."

Lady Eldridge threw out her hands in a gesture of despair. "Oh, I give it up," she said. "Everything seems to have been taken in the wrong way. I do think that two brothers who have been so much to each other as Edmund and William ought to be able to settle an absurd dispute of this sort without all this misunderstanding."

"That's exactly what I think. And if you and I are to mix ourselves up in it at all, we ought to try to clear up the misunderstandings."

"Yes, I want to do that. Tell me *why* William's letter should have put Edmund's back up more than anything."

"It's rather difficult, you see. You mustn't be impatient with me. You know that I am very fond of William, but you can't expect me to see him in quite the same light as you do, any more than you can see Edmund in the same light as I do. And you must remember that I'm trying to make peace all the time. Still, I see things with Edmund's eyes to some extent,

and after what had happened the day before I don't think it was unreasonable of him to object to being told in so many words that William couldn't be expected to take seriously things that *he* thought so important, especially Hayslope, which was only a very small corner of the world."

"Oh, Cynthia, what an absurd coil it all is! William *can't* have written that. I know the mood he was in when he went away to write."

"Well, dear, he did write it, and you must forgive me for saying that that attitude in him is continually coming out. This bother about the garden is only a symptom of it. It is the attitude itself that so annoys Edmund. I know that William is much higher up in the world now than my poor old man. But he ought not to want to rub it in, Eleanor. After all, Edmund *is* the older brother, and the head of the family. You can't defend William telling *him* that Hayslope is of very little importance. It's all he has in the world. Poor dear, he did his duty as a soldier during the war. I'm not saying he did *more* than William; but just look at the difference in the rewards they have got! Edmund will be a poor man for the rest of his life, because of the war, while William is rich and honoured."

"He isn't rich *because* of the war."

"Oh, no! I don't mean that at all. I should never say such a thing, or think it. And as for his knighthood, one knows that honours are given to the men who do the sort of work that he did, while a soldier's work is just taken as a matter of course. *You* know that it would never occur to me to feel jealousy on that

score, which is why I can put it quite plainly. Edmund doesn't feel it either, and he is proud of William's success; he has often said so. But still, *here*, Edmund ought not to be considered of less account than William. There! I have said it quite plainly, and you mustn't be offended."

"No, I'm not offended; though it makes me rather sad that all that should have to be said, because it is practically the same as William says himself, and tries to act upon. He did so in this very matter of the garden; but see how it has turned out! Edmund takes it as an offence that he should instantly have carried out what he thought were his wishes."

"But did he really mean to give up the garden, Eleanor? I will tell you frankly now, as we have gone so far, that Edmund's idea is that he hoped he would beg him not to. *You* wrote to me, you know, asking me to influence Edmund to do that."

"Not quite, Cynthia. At least—well—"

"You did, dear; and I should have tried to make the peace in that way, if it hadn't gone so far. I'm afraid you must admit that William acted hastily—I don't say more than that—and if he *did* expect Edmund to climb down, as Edmund believes—well, that's just exactly the spirit that I've been trying to point out to you is so objectionable to Edmund."

"Oh, it's all so different, Cynthia, from what happened on our side. Climb down! There was no such idea in William's mind. *Can't* we get it straight? Supposing William apologizes to Edmund for anything that may have displeased him! I believe he would be

ready to do that. And you mustn't forget Edmund's first letter to him, which you have acknowledged yourself—and I saw—was very dictatorial, and even offensive, though perhaps it was not meant to be so."

"Offensive! No, I shouldn't quite admit that."

"You say you didn't see it, dear. Among other things, he accused William of vulgarity."

"Vulgarity!" Mrs. Eldridge showed some surprise. "Well, of course that would be rather strong. But—"

"William is careless about Edmund's position here, you say. Very well. He doesn't mean to be, and perhaps Edmund doesn't mean to be dictatorial. But he is, you know, towards William; and considering the high estimation in which William is held, and the kind of people he mixes with, upon equal terms, it *is* sometimes rather difficult to put up with."

"Isn't all that rather apt to be pressed home upon us, dear? Not by you—I don't mean that. Naturally you are proud of the estimation in which William is held. I should be myself if I were in your place. But Edmund feels, I think, that he might be spared some of William's reminders on that point. In the very letter he wrote about the garden, in which he said that Hayslope couldn't be expected to be of such importance to him as it was to Edmund, he prepared the way by telling him of all the great people he was consorting with—as you say, upon equal terms."

"Which is exactly what I did, when I wrote to you after we had come back from Wellsbury. We *were* there on equal terms, you know; we didn't dine in the servants' hall."

"Oh, my dear, you mustn't take it in that way, or we may as well leave off talking about it altogether. *I* didn't show annoyance when you accused Edmund just now of being dictatorial and offensive. Don't let *us* fall out with one another, or *every*thing is lost."

Lady Eldridge sat more erect in her chair. "We *must* end it all," she said. "Neither you nor I want it to go on. Let us leave off finding faults in the other side, and admit that both sides have made mistakes. It *was* unfortunate that William should have wired to Coombe, and sent no message to Edmund at the same time. It's easy enough to see that now; but at the time it didn't occur to me, who was very anxious that offence should not be given, and I'm sure it didn't occur to William. I have told you, anyhow, that his resentment over Edmund's letter had passed over; so *that* can be cleared out of the way. Edmund need think no more about it. Now let us get William's mistake cleared out of the way. Tell Edmund that it was only carelessness on William's part that led to this new trouble, that *I* much regret it, now it has been pointed out to me, and that I'm sure William will when he knows the effect it had. Will you do that, Cynthia?"

"Yes, dear, of course I will. Don't let us have any more letters. Let us wait until you come down again next week, and then Edmund and William can talk it all over together, and I'm sure at the end of it they will be as good friends as before."

Lady Eldridge breathed an audible sigh of relief, and smiled. "*We* have talked pretty plainly to one

another," she said. "I am so glad that we can. What a lot of trouble that unfortunate garden plan of ours has made! And it looked as if we were all going to amuse ourselves so much with it."

"Oh, and I hope we shall. Do you know, I think Edmund is as much disappointed at the idea of its being given up as anybody. I haven't told you yet—we seem to have been talking about all sorts of outside things—that he *was* going to send a long telegram to William asking him to go on with it, even *after* Coombe had come to him and refused to take his orders."

Lady Eldridge seemed quite at a loss. She stared at her and said quietly: "No, you never told me that. I didn't know that Coombe had been to Edmund at all."

"How did you think he knew, then, that the men had been paid off? You haven't done my poor old Edmund quite justice, you know, Eleanor—but I don't want to begin on that again. He was naturally upset at hearing of it first from Coombe, and *yet* he was going to wire to William. In fact, he was going to climb down."

"Lady Eldridge passed this by with a slight contraction of the brows. "What prevented him from writing?" she asked.

"Oh, I haven't told you that. The labourers who had been dismissed came to him, and said they wouldn't go on working under Coombe. I'm afraid William will have to get rid of that man, Eleanor. The way he has behaved is perfectly outrageous. In fact, but for him, the garden might have been half finished by this time."

There was a moment's pause. Then Lady Eldridge said: "This is something quite new again. You must tell me everything, please, Cynthia."

"I don't know that there's much more to tell, dear. Coombe quite obviously came to Edmund to crow over him, though of course he *pretended* to be respectful. But when Edmund told him that there had been a mistake and that the work was to go on, he said he had had his orders and must abide by them. So what else could he have come for?"

"What did he say he had come for? I'm not defending him, but this is serious. I want to know exactly what happened."

"Oh, he pretended that the men who had been dismissed might make a disturbance in the village. So ridiculous! Two of them are Edmund's own tenants, and the other two are most respectable men, and one of them is a teetotaller. Edmund says he has seldom had work better done than they are doing it now."

"I wish William were here. Coombe has never given us any cause for dissatisfaction, and this is quite a new light on him."

"And afterwards it came out that he had spoken in the most impertinent way about Edmund to these very men; so much so, that old Jackson wouldn't put up with it, and *all* of them would have refused to go on working under him if he *had* been told to go on—by William, I mean, for he had been told to go on by Edmund and had refused to do so. The fact is, I suppose he had got into a mess with his men, and thought he could shift the blame on to Edmund. You see, dear,

—take it all round—it was really impossible that the work should be taken up again. Still, I quite hope that it may be, later, and be finished in time for the autumn planting. There isn't any violent hurry, is there?"

"No. But whether the garden is made or not seems so unimportant now in the face of all these complications. I think I won't say anything to Coombe myself, but will wait until William comes down. What was it actually that he said to the men about Edmund?"

"Oh, it was outrageous; but it shows the sort of feeling that has grown up with regard to Edmund and William. He told them that Edmund was desperately jealous of William on account of his title and his money, and that if this work they were doing was stopped they would have him to thank for it, for he hated William doing anything at Hayslope. Then of course he had been paying them more than the current rate of wages—I suppose William didn't know that—which made it difficult for Edmund when it came to employing them himself. But there they are, working for us at less than they were paid here, and refusing to go on under Coombe at the higher rate. So you see that Edmund *is* still respected by the villagers and work-people, in spite of all the difficulties that have been made."

Lady Eldridge arose somewhat abruptly. "We seem to have got back to general criticism," she said, "which I thought we had put behind us. I am not going on with that, Cynthia. I think we had better leave it alone altogether until William comes down. See, the rain has stopped. Let us go out."

CHAPTER XIV

CHURCH AND AFTER

THERE was nothing remarkable about Hayslope Church, unless it was its tower, which was large enough to make it a landmark for miles around, and its bells, whose full and mellow peal ringing out across the summer woods and fields, or in winter time over a landscape muffled white in snow, brought that sense of peaceful festivity which belongs especially to rural England, so many centuries old. The tower was of perpendicular architecture, the main body of the church, conceived with less largeness of aim, of an earlier date. But most of its character had been finally lost in the restoration to which it had been subjected in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Colonel Eldridge's grandfather had supplied the money for this work, as a thank-offering for the safe return of his son, who had been in the thick of the Indian Mutiny. The taste, which had seemed to him of the best, had been supplied by one or other of the ecclesiological malefactors of the time, whose baneful activities, carried on by their immediate successors, have left scarcely an old church in all England in which it is possible to feel the quiet and grateful influences of tradition. There were seats of pitch pine, varnished, a chancel paved with encaustic tiles, thinly lacquered metal work of a mean design, and a little

triple reredos of oak underneath the distressing colours of the East window.

And yet it was possible sometimes to catch the sense of the long past, which the restorers had done their mischievous best to destroy. Lady Eldridge, somewhat troubled in her mind, and anxious to lay hold of whatever composing influence the morning service could bring her, looked here and there during the progress of the sermon, and it came home to her—that soothing impression of age and use and wont, which is the rightful heritage of old churches, and especially of old country churches.

The seats belonging to the Hall and the Grange were in what had once been the South Chapel, and were slightly raised above the rest. The side view of the altar, the choir-boys and handful of choirmen, backed by the garishly patterned organ pipes, held nothing for the eye to rest on with pleasure. But the high pulpit, of Jacobean oak, from which Mr. Comfrey was engaged in directing his flock, was consecrated by some centuries of use to that weekly exercise. Behind him, in a line from where she was sitting, was a window of little diamond panes of clear glass, through which the trees could be seen, and the birds flying to and fro. Perhaps it was this which first brought the sense of peace to her mind; for that outlook into the happy world of birds and trees had often freed her thoughts from the slight oppression caused by Mr. Comfrey's dialectics, which were concerned with nothing that seemed to bear upon the life that was all about him. But this morning it set her thinking of the past, as it hung about the familiar

church, in which once or twice before she had caught at the skirts of time, and held them for a little.

Underneath the tower, from the wooden ceiling behind the high-pointed arch, the stout bell-ropes hung down, thickened with worsted where the ringers held them. Behind them were the ponderous oak doors, from a chink between which streamed a thin plate of golden light, that fell upon the sombre tables of the law, which the renovators had banished from over the altar; and above the arch was a large square panel painted with the Royal Coat of Arms. Somehow, the sight of these things, which had nothing to do with the long-ago history of the church, was grateful to her. Her imagination, and her knowledge, were equal to reviving some vision of the church as it had been before the Reformation, when the same kind of country-folk as now resorted to it fixed their stolid gaze upon the priest before the altar, and knew him in his outside comings and goings as the villagers of to-day knew their Mr. Comfrey. But it was a life nearer to her own, and yet established for some generations past, of which the voice of the old church whispered to her this morning. By turning her head to the right she could see a large mural monument of white marble, filling the space of a blocked-up window, which commemorated the virtues of an early eighteenth century Eldridge, and those, less enlarged upon but possibly as exemplary, of his wife. Those were the times of which she liked to think, and the years that came after them, when her husband's forbears lived in the Hall, much as it was now, and came here every Sunday, to take part in the same prayers and psalms,

and to listen, or otherwise, to sermons from the same pulpit. Some of them had lived through troublous times, but none, surely, in such a time of unrest as this, with the great catastrophe only just lifted, and its ultimate results not yet in any power to foresee. She herself had been less affected by it than many. She had lost no near relations; she had not to rearrange her life to meet reduced opportunities. But the weight of it hung over her all the same. It was a comfort to feel that here was something that went on, that came from a past not too remote, and was joined to her life by special ties.

In the two seats in front of her sat the family from the Hall. They had not come unscathed out of the catastrophe. Yet the same sense of something stable and supporting in this Sunday habit of churchgoing hung about them. More even than herself they belonged here. Almost more than the house they inhabited, this place seemed to stand for continuity and settlement in the lives of such as they. For life in the house must alter from time to time, and might alter much; but what went on in the church altered little.

Such a life as theirs seemed to her preferable to her own life, even with the restrictions that diminished means had brought them. Such restrictions would not have troubled her for herself, as long as the quiet round of daily duty and pleasure remained. She would have enjoyed it more than the life she led, chiefly in London. The days she spent at the Grange were the best days, but the Grange too seemed to echo the busy London life, so bound up in all its aspects with the spending of

money. There was some restful feeling about it, surrounded as it was by the woods and fields, but it was not to compare with the restfulness of the Hall, which reflected only the life of the country, as it had been lived there for generations. It seemed to her that if she had been in Cynthia's place she would have been glad that the London house had had to be given up, for all her interests then would have been concentrated upon the house which was really the home. Cynthia did love her country home, she knew, and had accepted the change in her lot with admirable absence of complaint. But they were not made alike; Cynthia would have been completely happy if their positions in life had been changed.

Colonel Eldridge sat upright in his seat, his closely-cropped grey head held erect, the brown skin of his neck and shaven cheek contrasting with the clean polished white of his stiff collar, his flat back and square shoulders clothed in dark creaseless serge. The rigid neatness of his appearance and attire went with his straight confined mind, in which there was little room for the leniencies that gave her the sense of something large and responsive in her husband. Her gaze rested on him, and she tried to imagine something of what he was thinking, as he sat so unmoved, his eyes bent down, and his ears, she was sure, not responsive to Mr. Comfrey's well-intentioned hair-splittings.

It was probably this effort to put herself in his place that brought to her a rush of pity for him, so strong that moisture came to her eyes, and she looked away to the ribbons and daisies in Isabelle's hat, immediately in front of her.

She had been hard to him in her thoughts, although she had worked upon her husband's more easily moved sensibilities to put aside the offence he had caused, and to treat him with generosity. She had even felt great impatience with Cynthia, though she hoped she had refrained from showing it. It had been difficult, the day before, to treat her with the customary affection, when they had laid aside their discussion, which was leading to no understanding, and spent an hour together out of doors. She believed Cynthia to be as anxious as she was that this unseemly dispute in which they had found themselves involved should end; but Cynthia had allowed herself to say many things that she would not have allowed to be said to her without taking great offence. She had been right to let them go by, but she was not so sure that she had not kept a spark of resentment over them alive in her mind. If so, she must put it out. Cynthia was her friend of many years, and did love her; of that she was assured. Friends ought to be able to speak plainly to one another, and if they did not agree upon a given subject, they must fall back upon the deeper agreement to which their friendship had brought them, tested by time and welded by affection.

In this dispute there seemed to be nothing that could be done by discussing the rights and wrongs of it. Discussion seemed only to add new causes of complaint, which were already so numerous as to be swamping the original one. But the deeper tie was there, for all of them. She made up her mind definitely that she, for her part, would lean all her weight upon it, and not allow

herself to be turned aside by any accidents of the moment. And she knew that William would be ready to act the large generosity that was his, even to the extent of accepting blame, where blame was not rightly due to him.

What was it that really lay at the bottom of the feeling that seemed to be growing up to separate them? Not the question of the garden, which had been complicated by all sorts of little mistakes, or it would have been amicably settled long ago. Cynthia had been right when she had said that that was only a symptom, though she had applied it only to one side. Edmund complained of William overshadowing him at Hayslope. That was what it came to in the last resort. Well, William was a man of mark, and Edmund was not. And it was impossible for William to put the same value upon what was of most importance to Edmund, which was also a cause of complaint. Hayslope wasn't and couldn't be always in the forefront of his mind, with all the varied and thronging interests that were his. Edmund ought to be able to see that; but if he couldn't, or wouldn't, then it only remained for William to be more careful than ever not to upset his dignity, which should not be very difficult for him, with the affection that he had for Edmund. As for the dictatorial methods that Edmund was apt to adopt towards his younger brother, perhaps it had been a mistake to bring them up at all. It would be small-minded to keep them standing as a subject for resentment, and they meant nothing that mattered. William had put up with them comfortably for the greater part of his life, and she

was sure he would go on putting up with them for the sake of keeping the peace.

Without a doubt, when the balance was struck, there had been more offence against them than against Edmund. Very well, then; it was for them to make light of it. They could well afford to do so. They had so much more than Edmund now; they would even stand in Edmund's place some day, if they survived him, and would have that in addition which he had hoped to have handed on to his son. Poor Edmund; he had been very much tried. It would not cost much to give way to him in this affair, and carefully to avoid all occasions of offence in the future.

The service came to an end, and the congregation streamed out into the bright sunlight. It was composed of the households from the Hall, the Grange, and the Vicarage, a few farmers and their families, villagers and labouring people. It had not filled half the church, for the country habit of churchgoing is lessening, along with the not so admirable habit of Sabbatarianism. At Hayslope, perhaps more people went to church than would be usual in a country village, because the gentry went regularly, and, although Colonel Eldridge would not have put pressure on any of his tenantry to follow his example, it was generally supposed that he liked to see as full a congregation as possible. It was his custom to linger in the churchyard after the service, to exchange salutations, and for a few words with one and another. Lady Eldridge, whose eyes and ears were open towards him, marked his pleasant courteous air with those to whom he spoke. It was plain that they

liked to be singled out by him. He was an excellent Squire, of a kind that is fast disappearing. There was nobody there that morning of whom he did not know something more than their occupations about this estate. He could probably have put a name to all the children, and they bobbed, and touched their caps to him, not as if they had merely been taught to do so. It was not, after all, so small a thing to hold the respect and esteem of some few hundreds of people towards all of whom, directly or indirectly, he stood in a special position not invariably easy to maintain. Money could not have bought just that response; there were many rich landowners, generous according to their lights, who would not have been liked and respected in the way this one was, who might now be called poor.

There was a gate leading from the churchyard to the Vicarage garden, but Fred Comfrey joined himself on to the Eldridges, who crossed the road and entered the park through the lodge gates, just opposite. He seemed to Norman, who watched him with an unfavouring eye, to do this with a hangdog air, as if he knew he was taking a liberty. At any rate, he should not walk with Pamela, if that was his object. Norman fastened upon her himself, and said: "Let's get away. I want to talk to you about something."

"Wait half a minute," she said, her head turned towards the group behind her; and then she moved towards Fred, and said: "I've found that book at last. If you'll come up now I'll give it to you."

Fred visibly brightened, before Norman's offended eyes, and seized upon her invitation as inclusive of her

company during the walk home, for he put himself instantly by her side. She threw a half-glance at Norman, such as to absolve her in his mind from having intended this; but she shouldn't have given the bounder the opportunity of joining her in that way. Of course he would stick like a leech, if he got the smallest encouragement.

Pamela said to Norman, trying to bring him into a conversation of three: "Do you remember that book, 'Jack o' the Mill' that Hugo used to be so fond of when he was a boy? I remember him showing me the pictures in it, when I was quite tiny. Fred reminded me of it, and I've found it for him."

"No," said Norman, who remembered the book perfectly well. But "no" was the shortest word he could find. He wanted to hear Fred talk, and give himself away.

Fred seemed to be quite ready to talk, and he did not follow Pamela's lead in trying to bring Norman into the conversation. He talked about Hugo, in a way that aroused Norman's contemptuous disgust. Really, one would have thought that the two of them together had been models of sweet and innocent boyhood, and that the one who was dead lived enshrined in the heart of the other as a tender memory that would never fade. Poor little Pam liked it, of course, and there was no objection to having Hugo turned into a plaster saint for her benefit. But the fellow was obviously out to recommend himself through this beatification, and to share the halo. He was trying now to bring Pamela herself into the picture of the blameless past, representing the three of

them as having taken part in the sacred idyll. This afforded Norman food for sardonic amusement, remembering as he did how little Pamela had been considered by the hulking brute that Fred had been then, or even by Hugo, when he had been in Fred's company. At the third or fourth "Do you remember?" he could stand it no longer, and turned back to join the children and Miss Baldwin, who were immediately behind them. This was intended as a protest, but neither Pamela nor Fred, in the interest of their conversation, seemed to notice it.

Fred did not stay to luncheon, although Norman heard his aunt invite him. He went off with his book, and Norman had his opportunity of talking to Pamela. It had been in his mind to begin upon the subject of Fred; but it was of no use just to repeat his warning of yesterday, and anything he might say about the conversation from which he had just retired in disgust would reflect upon Hugo. Hugo was becoming increasingly a subject not to be mentioned between him and Pamela. Besides, he *had* something he wanted to say to her.

She waited for him to speak first, as they turned towards the lawn, and possibly expected a rebuke, as before. "I say, Pam," he said. "This is a rotten business about the new garden."

"What new garden?" she asked in surprise, for her parents were old-fashioned in respect of not discussing all and everything before their children, and no echo of what had been disturbing them had reached her.

He was surprised in his turn. "What, don't you

know?" he said. "Father had begun to make a garden in that field at the bottom of the wood, and Uncle Edmund stopped it."

Then he gave her the story, as it had been told him by Coombe that morning, when he had gone down to Barton's Close, and found him in his Sunday clothes, musing over the havoc he had wrought. The story had lost nothing in the way of incrimination of Colonel Eldridge, and complete exculpation of himself.

"I don't believe it," said Pam shortly. "If anything has happened, it wasn't like that."

"Well, something *has* happened, because the digging was stopped a week ago, and the men who were doing it are working at the drive here."

"Yes, Dad did say, now I remember, that he had taken on some men who had been working for Uncle Bill. What does Auntie Eleanor say about it?"

"I haven't said anything to her. It seems to me, anyhow, as if our respective, and respected, parents had fallen out, and I want to know what line *we* are going to take about it."

"The line *I* should take about it, if I had to take any, would be that if Dad and Uncle Bill disagreed about something, Dad would be in the right."

"I say, Pam! Are you annoyed about anything?"

"No."

"Well, you're rather terse, aren't you? It's a pity, because you're looking particularly seraphic this morning. I noticed it first in church."

"It was very sweet of you; and I believe it to be so. Everything seemed to go on right this morning. There

are days like that. You don't think that Dad and Uncle Bill have really quarrelled, do you? Of course I know the garden *was* to be made, and it seems odd that it should have been left off like that."

"Yes, it is odd. I don't like to think of their having a row. It would be very unlike them. Still, according to Coombe—"

"*What*, according to Coombe? If he said what you say he did about Dad, you ought to have shut him up."

"I did, as a matter of fact. But there must be *something* in it."

"I think we'd better wait and see what there is. If there's anything at all, it will blow over. I suppose you can't expect them always to agree about everything, and Uncle Bill is so much away, and so busy, that he might not always think enough of Dad's point of view, who is always here."

"It might be something of that sort. Anyhow, *we* needn't take sides."

"Oh, *I* should, if there was really a quarrel. I adore Uncle Bill, but if it was a question between him and Dad I should take Dad's side through thick and thin. And I should expect you to take Uncle Bill's. So I expect we should quarrel worse than they would."

He laughed lightly. "Not much fear of our quarrelling," he said. "I say, Pam, have you seen Sunny Jim lately? I'm told that he is in residence at Pershore Castle, the seat of his father, the Earl of Crowborough, and a dull dog at that."

"Yes, he has been over here once or twice. I should

think he might quite possibly come over this afternoon. Do you want to see him?"

"I don't know that I particularly want to; but I shall, no doubt. How is his affair progressing?"

"What affair?"

"His suit for the hand of Miss Eldridge, of Hayslope Hall. Is his ardour still undiminished, and has he had any encouragement yet?"

Pamela laughed. "I'll tell you something, if you'll promise to keep it to yourself," she said.

Norman promised.

"Well, I don't think he knows it yet, but he is beginning to fall in love with Judith. She doesn't know it either, of course; but it's the greatest fun in the world to watch them."

"Tell me about it. I shouldn't mind that at all. As a matter of fact, I think Jim ought to be kept in the family, dull as he is. As long as it isn't you!"

"Judith doesn't find him dull. And you make a great deal too much of his dulness. He isn't interested in the things that we like; but he does know a lot, and I should think he was very sound in what he does know."

"Let's hope he is. Oh, he's not a bad fellow, I like old Jim; and people liked him at school. It's only that one gets in the way of labelling a fellow. Judith's a funny bird; you never quite know how to take her. She's extraordinarily pretty, though, and ought to be prettier still when she's quite fledged. I don't wonder that Jim is beginning to see it."

"Oh, but I don't think he is yet. As the danger is passing, I don't mind admitting now that I *was* the

attraction, and perhaps he still thinks I am. He—Well, he behaves like that. But it's Judith who really interests him—I suppose because he interests her. They talk over all sorts of things together, and he tells her everything about himself, and what he is going to do. At *present* he doesn't in the least mind a third person assisting in their confabulations; and of course *she* doesn't, except that—you know—she hates giving herself away. I keep quiet, and listen, putting in a word every now and then, so that I shan't appear to be just taking notes of them. It's awfully funny; and rather touching too, sometimes. I'm longing for the time to come when I shall be found *de trop*. When that happens, something else will happen very soon afterwards."

"Rather exciting, isn't it? Have the parents tumbled to it yet, do you think?"

"Not to Judith. Oh, look! There he is! I said he would be over to-day. Now, if you keep your mouth shut and your ears open you'll see that I'm right."

Lord Horsham advanced across the lawn towards them, a smile of deprecation on his face. His apologies and explanations over having invited himself to lunch, delivered with looks directed straight at Pamela, seemed to furnish a contradiction to her late pronouncement. But when he had made them, and addressed a few words to Norman, he drew from under his arm a large Blue Book, and asked: "Where's Judith? I said I would bring this over to show her. It's about Rural Housing. You know we were talking about it the other day."

"Yes," said Pam. "I know she wants to hear more about it. I think you'll find her in the library, Jim. I

won't come in just now, because Norman and I have something to talk about."

"Oh, I'm sorry I disturbed you. Yes, I'll go and find her. You're *sure* Mrs. Eldridge won't mind my inviting myself like this?"

He was once more reassured, and went off. "You see!" said Pam, in a low voice. "I took a bright part in that conversation, but it's with Judy he wants to go on with it."

"Oh, it's a cinch!" said Norman, with delight. "Dear old silly old solemn old Jim, and Judith with her golden hair a hanging down her back! What a lark, Pam! But I say, old girl, I don't quite like the idea of you getting left in this way. If everything else had failed I did think you could fall back upon the Viscountess Horsham. Are you sure you don't mind? You're not hiding rampant jealousy under a mask of indifference, are you? It *is* sometimes done, I know."

"No, I'm not. It's an incubus lifted from me."

"Well, it *would* have been rather rotten. You're made for better things. What I have thought of doing is to bring relays of bright young fellows down to stay, and let you run your eye over them. What do you think of that? I'm rather tired of running about, and I thought I'd stay here for a bit, and do some work, and play with you."

"Oh, I'm so glad, Norman. It is a little dull here sometimes without you. As for the bright young fellows, I shall be pleased to inspect them. I do enjoy a little male society occasionally."

CHAPTER XV

THE RIFT

Dusk was beginning to fall as Colonel Eldridge took a last stroll round the garden he loved, smoking the pipe to which he had taken when he had decided that cigars were too expensive for him any longer. The rest of the family were at the Grange, except the two children, who were supposed to be in bed. Whether they actually were so or not their father allowed himself to doubt, with a smile at the corners of his mouth. They had been keeping him company until summoned by Miss Baldwin, and his thoughts were still upon them. He had a great love for young children, but some stiff reserved trait in his character prevented him from showing it, even to his own, when there was anyone else by. What he liked was to have them to himself, and listen to their prattle, which was all music in his ears, though he affected to exercise some control over it. He would rather stay at home with the children, he had said, than dine at the Grange; but Mrs. Eldridge had understood that he would not go there until the dispute beween him and his brother was settled. Sir William was coming down late that evening, dining on the train.

The children actually were in bed; for Miss Baldwin, always eager to get to her evening's reading, was strict in this matter. She was sitting by the window that

faced on to the drive. She liked best the other windows, with their view across the lawn, but thought that Colonel Eldridge might look up and see her there, and feel that he was being watched. She did take an occasional surreptitious look at him. He was interesting her at this time, for she thought that he must soon come into the story which she was weaving around Pamela, and though she knew how he ought to act in order to advance the interest of the story, she was not sure that he would fulfil her expectations. It was more interesting so. One did not always want to look at pages ahead in an exciting story.

Miss Baldwin was not so immersed in the printed story she was reading as to be quite oblivious to the beauty of the scene before her, in the fading light of the summer evening. She sometimes raised her eyes to it, with a grateful sense of its increasing her enjoyment in the pleasant hour that was all her own. The sky was an expanse of faint pulsing blue, passing to a delicate rose above the horizon; the distant country was losing its sharper details in the pale haze that enveloped it, but the heavy mass of Pershore Castle could still be seen in the middle distance, and kept alive in her mind that other story which she was making for herself.

It was this state of awareness, no doubt, that suggested to her that the motor-car which she descried on the drive, upon one of her upward looks, was bringing one of Pamela's suitors to interview Pamela's father. Horsham had driven himself over a few evenings before, after dinner, with the offer of a joy-ride. She rose

hastily and looked out of the other window. Colonel Eldridge was still there, looking at his roses now, in the garden nearest the drive. He would be seen by whoever was in the car, and it was probable that the ensuing conversation would take place under her eyes.

The car could be seen more plainly when she went back, and it was a disappointment to recognize it as Sir William Eldridge's big touring Rolls-Royce, instead of the more modest and slightly out-of-date Rénault from Pershore Castle. It had purred up to the iron gate which divided the gravelled square in front of the house from the park by the time she had adjusted her mind to the disappointment, and while the chauffeur was opening the gate she looked out again at Colonel Eldridge, who by this time had heard it, and was moving towards where he could see who was coming. She saw Sir William hitch himself out of the driving-seat, and go across to his brother, with the light active step which she always admired in him, and heard his hearty greeting. "Well, Edmund, old fellow, I thought I'd come and have a word or two with you on my way home, though I wasn't sure that you wouldn't be dining at the Grange. Eleanor wrote that Cynthia and the girls were."

It seemed to Miss Baldwin that Colonel Eldridge's reply to the greeting was lacking in the warmth which it invited. But his manner was never so free and open as Sir William's, who had the pleasantest way with him, even when he addressed himself to a retiring but appreciative governess. The words he used had no importance to impress themselves upon her, but Sir

William's next speech, delivered in his clear voice, which carried them up to her, were: "I'm glad I've found you alone, then. Look here, old boy, let's get this tiresome business that we've been writing about out of the way." Here they moved off together on to the lawn. "The last thing in the world I want is to get up against you, and if I've done or written anything that has offended you, I'm sorry for it."

There was a pause before Colonel Eldridge replied. His voice was in a lower key, and by this time they were out of hearing. Miss Baldwin, who had much delicacy of feeling, shut the two windows which looked on to the lawn, softly, while their backs were turned to her; but she did not forbid herself to conjecture what it was that had happened between them or to taste her own surprise that anything should have happened to bring forth that introductory speech. She did not connect it with the affair in which she was so interested, for she had not given Sir William a part in that story. Probably it was nothing of any consequence, and when they had talked it over, walking up and down the lawn, Colonel Eldridge with his pipe, Sir William with his cigar, they would go into the house, and Sir William would take a little refreshment before driving himself home to the Grange. The great car stood there below, its latent power ready to be put in motion at a moment's notice, and the chauffeur stood by it, as if he, at least, was not expecting to be kept there long.

The two men walked up and down together for half an hour, until it became too dark to see their faces. Sometimes they stopped in their walk and stood still

for a time, and then they would go on again. Sometimes Sir William made a gesture, but Colonel Eldridge hardly moved his hands, except to take his pipe out of his mouth, and once to fill and light it again. It was impossible for Miss Baldwin, who now watched them, fascinated by a sense of drama, and with no pretence to herself of not doing so, to avoid the conviction that their dispute was serious, and not easy of settlement. She thought she could tell from Sir William's movements that he was coming to feel more and more annoyance, and that Colonel Eldridge was also angry, though he was exercising control over himself.

But surely, it must end some time! It was so dark now that she could only just see their forms in the shade of the trees, and Sir William's cigar glowed with a red point of light; and still they went on. She began to get alarmed lest Colonel Eldridge might look up at the windows of the schoolroom and notice that they were unlit, and it would be discovered that she had been watching them, sitting in the dark. But she dared not draw the curtains now, for that would be to attract attention.

The end came suddenly, and in a way to make her draw her breath. They had been stationary for some time, and their voices had raised themselves slightly. She could hear them through the other window, which remained open, but not what they were saying. Sir William walked quickly across the lawn, and through the gate to where his car was standing. He got into his seat, and the twin lights in front of the car blazed out blindingly. The chauffeur ran to open the gate

into the park, and it seemed to her that he hardly had time to jump on to the car as it went through it, swinging to behind them. She watched the radiance that moved with it, and the little point of red light behind it, until it disappeared over a dip, and then went again to the other window. Colonel Eldridge was lighting his pipe once more. When he had done so, he resumed his slow pacing of the lawn.

They were playing Bridge at the Grange, Lady Eldridge and Pamela against Mrs. Eldridge and Norman. Judith, who did not care for Bridge, was deep in a big chair, reading a book. Her passion for facts, lately fostered by her friendship with Lord Horsham, had not driven her to choose this book, which was "Three Men in a Boat." She read it closely, turning over the pages at regular intervals, and never smiled once. But when she came to reproducing scraps of its wisdom after she had digested it and made it her own, she would make others laugh over it.

Her mother's eyes were often upon her in the intervals of the game, with a sort of critical look, as if she were trying to see her in some new light. She made a picture to fill the eye, in her white frock, with the deep purple ribbons at her waist and in her dusky hair. The dark covering of the chair framed her young form, and threw up the delicate profile of her face, the long lashes veiling her eyes, the full red lips a little apart. She was a very beautiful girl, but childhood seemed to linger about her, emphasized by the way her hair was done, and the slim crossed ankles beneath her

skirt, shorter than she would presently come to wear it. Was her mother trying to see her as already a woman? It would not be surprising if others did, though it was doubtful if she herself was yet ready to step out of the enchanted garden of her girlhood.

A rubber was just finished, and Pamela and Norman were endeavouring to come to some agreement about the score, when sounds were heard outside which caused Lady Eldridge to rise from her chair. "That must be William," she said. "He's very late. I'll just go and see if he wants anything."

She went out, and did not return. Pamela and Norman finished their calculations and leant back in their chairs. Mrs. Eldridge had already moved to a more comfortable one, and was sitting there in silence, looking out into the night, through the open French windows.

Presently it became noticeable that they were left alone. Even Judith looked up from her book inquiringly, but turned again to Montmorency, relieved, perhaps, at having a few more minutes' respite. Norman said: "I wonder what they're doing?" Then he and Pamela began to play Patience, and so they all continued, but with expectancy.

Ten minutes must have gone by before Lady Eldridge came in again. Her sister-in-law threw a sharp glance at her, but she showed no traces of anything having happened to disturb her, unless it was in an added seriousness of expression. "William sends his love, and hopes you will excuse his coming in," she

said. "He has some letters to write before he goes to bed."

Mrs. Eldridge got up. "It is time we were going," she said, and Lady Eldridge did not ask her to stay longer, though it was not later than half-past ten, and their parties did not usually break up so early. Norman looked quickly from one to the other, and said: "All right; I'll go and get the car. I shall be ready by the time you've got your bonnet and spencer on, Aunt Cynthia."

Their light cloaks were in the hall. Pamela went out to get hers, and Judith followed her, Mrs. Eldridge lingering behind. "William went to see Edmund on his way home," Lady Eldridge said to her; "and they have quarrelled. Oh, Cynthia, do put it right! I'll do all *I* can. We mustn't stay here now, or the girls will suspect something."

She had spoken with great earnestness, though hurriedly, and immediately went into the hall, where she talked to Pamela and Judith until Norman came round with the car. Mrs. Eldridge said nothing; but when she kissed her sister-in-law good-night, she gave her a pressure of the hand, which was returned as warmly.

Pamela sat in front with Norman. The car he was driving was half closed, and the screen behind them allowed them to talk without being overheard by Mrs. Eldridge and Judith. "Father has been with Uncle Edmund," he said, "for nearly an hour. I'm afraid they've had a row."

Pamela had not imagined anything of the sort, and

was disagreeably affected. "Oh, they can't have," she said. "Why do you think so?"

"Well, it was odd, his not coming in. And why shouldn't mother have said that he had been at the Hall? And why should she have stayed out with him so long?"

Depression seized upon Pamela. She was young enough to feel rather shocked at the idea of her elders quarrelling, which had never happened at home within her knowledge. The Hall and the Grange had been in such close contact for years past that her uncle and aunt shared something of the feeling that she had for her parents, who had not yet come to be criticized by their children. It was unpleasant to think of them as moved by temper, or more than on the surface by irritation, at least against one another. A rift would affect them all. A disagreeable impression had already been made by Uncle Bill not coming in to see them, for he had always given them such a welcome, and hurried to greet them as if they were a part of his own family, whom he was glad to see again after an absence.

"I suppose it's about that beastly garden," said Norman. "But mother told me he had written to her about it, and said that he wasn't going on with it now. If he went to see Uncle Edmund on his way home, it can only have been to tell him so."

The implied criticism of her father moved Pamela. "It's no use our imagining what it is," she said. "Let's wait until we know."

"Yes; we can't do anything. I suppose mother and

Aunt Cynthia can, though. *They* don't want to quarrel."

"Dad and Uncle William won't either. I should think Uncle Bill is more easily upset than Dad. If he is annoyed with him now, he will have got over it by to-morrow."

There was a slight pause. "It's rather beastly, you know," Norman said. "Already, in the few words we've had about it, I've been looking at it from father's point of view and you from Uncle Edmund's. I suppose it's natural; but what I think is that it can't be anything serious, and there's no reason for us to take sides. I won't, anyhow. I dare say you're right, and father is more quick-tempered than Uncle Edmund. They're both jolly good sorts, and I don't think you'll often find two brothers of their age who get on so well together as they do. I suppose I'm rather like father myself. I've often said things you haven't liked, but I've been sorry for them afterwards."

This touched her. It was one of the things that she loved about Norman—his quick reactions at the call of affection. She had sometimes been guilty of arousing his annoyance, so that she might see him come round to her again. "I'm sure we needn't worry ourselves," she said, with more agreement in her tone than she had used before. "Uncle Bill not coming in to see us was so unusual that we are making more of it than it can possibly mean. Supposing they were both angry with one another just now, it can't possibly last. Even if they didn't calm down at once themselves, mother and Auntie Eleanor wouldn't let them go on with it."

Norman laughed at that. "And if they couldn't stop them, we should," he said. "We're all like one family. Nothing could separate us for long."

When they came to the iron gate where the park ended, it was to find it open. "Oh, there's Dad!" said Pamela, and called out a greeting to him as they passed through. "I'm so glad, Norman. *He* isn't keeping out of your way. He must have got over it already."

She ran back to her father when the car stopped before the door, and put her arm through his. "Have you been lonely without us, darling?" she said. "I'll stay with you till Norman goes through again. I know he isn't coming in."

It was in his usual rather expressionless voice that he asked her: "Had a good evening? The children and I practised archery, with some old bows and arrows they found upstairs. I think we must set that up properly."

It was a great relief to her to find him like this. When Norman came back slowly through the gate, he thanked him for bringing them home, and bid him good-night in his usual way. She could see that Norman was relieved too. There had been if not an actual quarrel something very like it, but this was the way in which such unfortunate occurrences between elders should be treated, with nothing of it allowed to be seen by those who looked up to them. She could not help comparing his attitude with that of Uncle William, who had taken it in such different fashion. Her father's dignity and self-control seemed to her to exhibit itself plainly beside his unwillingness to show him-

self under his annoyance. It was not difficult to judge which of the two was more likely to have been in the right.

They shut the gate and went back to the house. Colonel Eldridge kissed her good-night. "I'll go and have a word with mother," he said.

Yes, something had happened, and her father and mother would talk it over together. And very soon it would all be put right. Uncle William and Auntie Eleanor were also probably talking it over, and she would certainly bring him to the right frame of mind. He was such a good sport, though without the essential wisdom that showed up so plainly in her father. He must have been in the wrong; but he was so generous and so affectionate that it would not take him long to see it and to say so.

As for Norman, his uncle's greeting had removed his discomfort entirely. The best of friends were apt to fall out occasionally, and if that had happened between his father and his uncle, it was nothing to worry about. He dismissed them from his mind as he sped down the drive, until he had to slow up for that part of the road which was under repair, when it occurred to him that this was probably what the row was about. The workmen who had been engaged for work at the Grange had been snooped for work at the Hall. Really, that *was* rather thick! There was no doubt that Uncle Edmund had an arbitrary way with him; but he was a thoroughly good old sort, all the same. Norman had many kindnesses to remember from him, from his early boyhood, when country pursuits had not come to him

so readily as they did now, and during his visits to the Hall it had always been thoughtfully arranged that he should have all possible opportunities for enjoying himself.

He did not accelerate to his former pace when he had passed over the loose stones but leant back in his seat and crawled along, so as to give himself up to the romance of the summer night, and all the moving thoughts that his surrender to it would bring him. The young moon had not long since risen, and bathed the undulating spaces of the park in a soft, silvery sheen. The night coolness after the heat of the day brought sweet, sharp scents to his nostrils. The still beauty of the night seemed to be inviting him to something more than a solitary appreciation of it. He wished he had suggested that they should go for a longer drive. He and Pam both loved the beauty of the earth, and would have expressed their love for this sweet aspect of it to one another, heightening their own appreciations, as they did with every new discovery they made about truth and beauty. Pam was a girl in a thousand. His thoughts dwelt upon her, though he had thought of inviting them to the contemplation of another figure. As an only child he was lucky to have these girl cousins at the Hall, in place of sisters, and especially Pam, whom he had loved since she was a tiny child, Pam, who had grown up to take so many of her ideas and opinions from him, as a girl should, with one much older, who had seen more of the world than she had. Pam was grown up now; sometimes she expressed ideas of her own, and was inclined to assert them, as

she had not been wont to do. That made her more interesting, for he would not have had her a mere echo of himself; and he knew that, for all her little charming airs of independence, she still looked up to him and admired him, which was right too, for although there were many better fellows than himself, he had taught her to accept the right pattern. Pam would be throwing herself away if she chose from another one. He was glad that the danger from Horsham's incipient suit seemed to be over. It was odd that he should be coming to prefer Judith, who, in spite of her beauty, had none of the bright charm and cleverness of dear Pam; but Horsham certainly wasn't good enough for her, though he would do very well for Judith. As for that outsider, Fred Comfrey . . .!

Norman accelerated here, and did not slow down again until he had reached the elaborate iron gates which gave access to the Grange. He had had the idea of a long moonlight drive by himself, with his thoughts to keep him company, but changed his mind now, and went in.

As he entered the brightly lit hall, the remembrance of the occurrences of half an hour before returned to him. He hadn't seen his father yet, who would probably be in his room, for he never went to bed early. He would go in and find out all about it.

CHAPTER XVI

CRISIS

Mrs. Eldridge was waiting for her husband in his room, where he usually sat for an hour or so after she had gone to bed. The lamps were lit and the curtains drawn. She was standing by the fireplace, and still wore her cloak over her evening gown. She looked amazingly young for her years as she stood there in her graceful evening guise, with an expression of almost childish alarm in her eyes, looking up at him expectantly.

"Did you see William?" he asked her shortly.

"No," she said. "He wouldn't come in to us. We came away about a quarter of an hour after he had come, without seeing him."

"Ah!"

He was very quiet in speech and manner, with an air as it struck her, of great depression. She could not be sure, until he had spoken, of what had happened, that he had not something deeply to regret upon his own part.

"Better sit down," he said, "and I'll tell you about it. Until William apologizes to me for things he has said, and dismisses that man Coombe for his insolence, I won't see him or have anything to do with him. But I don't want you or the children to make any difference. Let's hope Eleanor will bring him to reason; I

know she has a good influence over him. She may not want to meet me; I've thought of that. But I should like you to go to the Grange as usual. I don't want you to quarrel with William either. We'll leave the quarrelling to him, as he seems bent on it."

"Tell me what happened, dear," she said. "He came here on his way home, didn't he?"

"Oh, yes; with an air of coming to put everything right by making handsome concessions over something he doesn't care a hang about. If I was so unreasonable as to question anything he had done he would give it up—of course. I wasn't to be allowed to have had any reason on my side; it didn't matter even that he'd mistaken me, and that I hadn't wanted to stop what he was doing, and had tried to get it carried on. He waved all that aside—didn't want to talk about it. What he did want was very plain. He wanted to show himself as the large-minded man who could make all allowances for a narrow-minded fool of an elder brother always standing on his own petty dignity. However, he'd be careful not to tread on my corns in that way again. Let's forget all about it and begin afresh. I would have swallowed all that—I did swallow it—for there was some right feeling behind it; but . . ."

"Edmund dear," she interrupted him, "before you go on—oughtn't we to keep that in front of us as the thing that really matters? William *is* fond of you, and you of him. When Eleanor and I have been talking it over, we . . ."

"It has got beyond that now," he interrupted her in his turn. "What neither you nor Eleanor can see

is that William is not the same man as he used to be. What really matters, you say! What really matters is what he founds himself upon; and what he founds himself upon now is his money, and the place he has made for himself in the world. Fond of me? Yes, I dare say he is. He'd like to do this or that to help me where things are difficult; but it's to be on the understanding that I knuckle under to him. I can't accept his help, or his—or his fondness on those terms. I'm fond of him, you say? Yes—or of what he was before his success spoilt him. When he returns to that, things shall be as they were between us. Until then, I've got to take him as he is now; and without loss of self-respect I can't do it and keep on terms with him."

"What was it, then, that you quarrelled about?"

He hesitated at the word. "William may call it quarrelling," he said. "I suppose it is just a quarrel to him. I shouldn't admit that I quarrelled. He got very excited, and I didn't. That's the plain truth. I didn't feel excited; I felt very sad."

"My poor old darling!" she said tenderly. "It's too bad of William, with all the troubles you have had on you."

He went on, in the same quiet, unemotional voice: "I accepted his good will. Yes, I did that, though his way of expressing it was distasteful to me. But I said that I didn't want the cause of complaint set aside like that. I thought that the reasons I had given against the extra garden-making were sound; but they didn't override other considerations and I should prefer it to go on. That didn't seem to suit him. In the

mood he was in, I suppose he didn't want *me* to be the one to make concessions. But I rather think, from something he let fall, that he has something new on hand to interest him, and the garden plan means nothing to him now; or at any rate that he would rather give it up, on the grounds of giving way to me, than go on with it because I have given way to him. That's one of the ways in which his money has spoilt him. When a man has a lot of money, and doesn't care for just piling it up, he's always looking about for ways of spending it; and the last way he has found is all important to him, until he finds another one; then his interest in it goes. I'm sure that's how it is with William. But I was firm about it. 'It may not interest you now as much as it did,' I said; 'but the way in which it has been thrown over will reflect upon me, if it is given up altogether. For one thing, there's Barton's Close already cut up, and you can't leave it like that. You must either go on with the work or put it back as it was. It has been put about that I stopped the work, unreasonably; and the men who were doing it are now working for me. If you want to do justice to me, you'll remove all that talk, and you can only do it by going on. When the road has been mended,' I said, 'you can take on that extra labour again, and get all the digging and so on done in time to plant!'"

"Did he make any fuss about the men being taken on for the drive?"

"It was one of the things that he had put aside, with a wave of the hand, as if I had done something

that I ought not to have done, but he would overlook it with the rest. That was why I mentioned it. I wasn't going to justify myself about it, but I said: 'The men wouldn't have gone straight back to work for you after being sent away; but they will when the time comes, if I talk to them.' He didn't quite like that either. He was gradually losing his position as being entirely in the right, but giving way because it wasn't worth while to come up against me in something that didn't matter. It does matter, and I was determined not to close it up on those terms.'

"At last he agreed to go on, but by that time he had lost a good deal of his—what shall I say?—expansive manner, and gave in grudgingly. Then he was for going home, and if it could have been settled at that, there would have been an end of the affair. I had left Coombe out of it until then, for I didn't want it complicated by something that I thought would probably be new to him altogether. I said: 'There's one thing, William, that I must ask you to do and that is to send Coombe about his business. If it hadn't been for him the work would have been going on now. You can easily satisfy yourself about that,' I said, 'and I don't press it. But Coombe spoke of me openly with the grossest impertinence, and in a way that you would have resented just as much as if you had heard it. I've held my hand,' I said; 'I left it till you came down. But something has got to be done about it now.'"

"You didn't tell me, dear, that you were going to say that Coombe must be sent away."

"I didn't talk to you much about Coombe, did I? I

took it for granted that William would dismiss him when he knew what sort of man he was. Servants may talk about you behind your back, and I dare say most of them do. But when it is brought to your notice you can't shut your eyes to it. If I had heard one of mine speaking of William in the way that fellow spoke of me, I should have sent him about his business in double-quick time, however useful he was to me."

"Did William refuse to do it?"

"He haggled about it. He had always found Coombe perfectly respectful. Surely I was mistaken. He couldn't have said what he was reported to have said. If I showed annoyance at all perhaps I showed it then; but I had myself in hand. I knew that if I got into the excited state that he was beginning to get into then, it was all up. Besides, I was determined that he should get rid of Coombe. For one thing, it will be a sort of test of his sincerity, for I don't deny that it will be of some inconvenience to him. Coombe is a good gardener, and they are not so easy to get now. But it's a monstrous idea that a man who has openly shown his hand in that way should be kept in the place. It would have a bad effect all round. William ought to be able to see that, and I told him so."

"Did you tell him exactly what the man had said?"

"I told him the worst of it. I said: 'One of the things that was repeated to me was that I was jealous of your money and your title, and I should stop you doing anything you wanted to do in Hayslope if I possibly could. Are you going to keep in your service a man who has said a thing like that about me?' I

asked him. He said he didn't believe it had been said; somebody was trying to stir up mischief. I said: 'I'm afraid, William, that your money and your title have had an influence in this place that isn't exactly what you think it to be. This man Coombe has only let some of it out. Still,' I said, 'he's let it out in such a way that it can't be passed over. The only way you can possibly put it right is to show that *you* are not going to stand that sort of talk, and the only way you can do that is to send Mr. Coombe marching. And that's what you'll do,' I said, 'if you mean what you have been saying about wanting to put things straight between us, and to work in with me here at Hayslope.'"

"Yes," she said with a sigh, "I think you were right there."

"I'm sorry to say that that was too much for him. It was the end of anything like reasonable talk on his part. Every now and then he seemed to be trying to pull himself together, as when he tried to get from me who had heard those words said; but when I told him, he said that I had only got them third-hand, and it wouldn't be fair on Coombe to sack him without giving him a chance to defend himself. I said I shouldn't expect him to do anything but deny it all. 'And with all respect to you, William,' I said, 'I'm not going to make you a judge between me and your servant. You can ask old Jackson, if you like, what happened; but even by doing that you'll be appearing to doubt my word, and you won't want to do it if you're ready to act rightly by me. As long as that man remains in

your service,' I said, 'I'm not going near the Grange. You owe it to me to send him away.' "

"Was that at the end of all?"

"No. He wouldn't promise to do it without making inquiries for himself, and I said: 'Very well, then; you are putting yourself definitely against me here. I suppose you understand that. How do you propose that we shall go on living next door to one another with this between us? It will be known all over the place that Coombe has insulted me, that you have been told of it, and don't think it necessary to take any steps. It's an impossible position,' I said."

"Surely he could see that, couldn't he?"

"He had worked himself up into such a state then that he couldn't see anything. After that, until he went away, he was simply offensive. He justified everything that I have said about his attitude towards me and more. Oh, I don't want to go over it all. I should think he'd be sorry when some of the things he said come back to him. There was he, spending his life in the service of his country, and here was I, consumed with jealousy of him and thinking only how I could put spokes in his wheel. It's that accusation of jealousy that I won't put up with. He must withdraw it and apologize for it before I'll meet him again. It means a break, Cynthia. I had time to think it all over before you came home. I'm afraid it means a break. He brought Eleanor into it. He gave me to understand that she was up against me for what he was pleased to call my dictatorial ways; it wasn't only he who had suffered under them. If that's so, she won't

try to put it straight, and that's really the only chance with what it has come to now."

"Oh, my dear, she will. I know she will. She and I talked about it the other day. I know what is in her mind. She only meant that first letter you wrote, and she said that that was all wiped out now. I told you, didn't I? She is longing for it to be put right. She will do all she can, I know."

"I hope so. It will be a very serious matter if it isn't put right. But I stand upon those two points. William must take back that accusation of jealousy. It's a wrong thing for one brother to say of another."

"Oh, yes. If it was said in the heat of the moment . . ."

"I'm afraid that what was said in the heat of the moment was only what has been building itself up in his mind for a long time past. It's a result of his deterioration. Because I don't treat him as I suppose other people do who worship success—and he has come to want that—I'm jealous of his success. He can't see straight any longer; he can't see me as I've always been, and am still. *That* is what is between us, and it goes deeper than anything he has said or done. He isn't any longer the brother I used to have."

She saw that he was deeply moved and that it was no time now to say anything to alter his mind. Besides, the one fact that she and Eleanor had both insisted on as lying behind everything—the affection between the brothers—seemed no longer to govern the situation. Their ways had widely diverged, and it looked as if they

had drifted apart in spirit as well as in the interests they had once held in common.

Her husband rose from his chair with a deep sigh, and said something that she was unprepared for. "Thank God, that I've still got you and the children left to me!"

She broke down and shed tears, but dried them immediately, for she knew how he disliked the expression of emotion, and that his own had been wrung from him only by deep feeling. He kissed her good-night and said kindly: "Don't take it too much to heart. And if you and Eleanor can mend it between you, you won't find me implacable. I've gone a long way in trying to put it straight, and I'll go further if it's necessary."

"If William will apologize?" she said, making a last effort.

"I'll do without an apology. After all, it isn't words that I want. Let him dismiss Coombe, without any further to-do. I'll take that as covering everything. I dare say I said things to him that offended him as much as he offended me, though it is certain that I held myself more in hand than he did. No, I don't want any apology. But he must dismiss Coombe."

CHAPTER XVII

HONOURS

The difference between Colonel Eldridge's room at the Hall and his brother's at the Grange was a good deal more than the difference between a room in an old house and one devoted to like uses in a new. Indeed if you had averaged the age of their contents, the room at the Grange would have shown the earlier date. It had been one of the latest additions, when furniture and decoration had become a source of keen interest to its owner, and there had been no lack of money to carry out his tastes.

There was no bright Turkey carpet or American desk here, as in Sir William's room in London. He wrote his letters at a Queen Anne Bureau, bought at Christie's for a sum that would have paid for everything in his brother's room and left a substantial amount over. There was no insistent colour, to detract from the rich subdued values of this and other fine pieces of furniture. A few pictures of the early Dutch school, which Sir William particularly affected, hung upon the walls, panelled in dark oak. The electric light glowed and sparkled from a lustre chandelier of Waterford glass. The few ornaments admitted were also mostly of old glass, and as many of them as were suitable held flowers. There was a beautiful soft-hued Persian carpet, and curtains of heavy brocade of no determinate hue. Only

the books in the glass-fronted Sheraton bookcase were mostly new, many of them in rich bindings; and the easy chairs and sofa were of the latest word in comfort.

The room was a success from first to last, and Sir William felt it to be so every time he entered it. And yet he still gained, whenever he went into his brother's room at the Hall, a sense of satisfaction for which he would perhaps have exchanged the different sort of pleasure that he took in his own creation. That room, with its old-fashioned furniture of no special value; its faded and threadbare carpet, and shabby easy chairs; the untidy books on the shelves; the paintings, prints and photographs that crowded the walls; the medley of ornaments and knicknacks on the mantelpiece and side-tables; the gun-cases, cartridge-cases, game-bags, golf-clubs, and all the litter of a sportsman's room; the very smell of it, compounded of tobacco smoke and leather, slightly musty paper, and slightly damp dog, with a reminder of ripe apples mysteriously underlying it all—it meant quiet and ease and a thousand associations of indoor and outdoor life, hardly any of which were represented in the room that was his. He had even been slightly ashamed of his room when he had first shown it to his brother, who had said: "It's very fine. I've never seen a finer, for a fellow who can live up to it. It wouldn't do for me, because I couldn't keep that old shooting-jacket of mine hanging up behind the door." That was it, Sir William decided afterwards. It was really a room for a man who liked to live in a drawing-room, and he didn't want, himself, to live always in a drawing-room, even a man's drawing-room. Still, he

liked to have beautiful things about him, and with that taste you had to discriminate. You couldn't get the two kinds of attraction into the same room. He had the one, and must do without the other.

It was this room that Norman entered when he returned from the Hall. He had none of the doubts about it that his father sometimes expressed. His appreciations were finer than his father's. Sir William had to possess a treasure of art for it to give him the acme of pleasure. Norman loved it for itself, and he loved the beautiful things in this room. His appreciation of it even affected him now, as he went in, though he was thinking of something else. His mother, in her evening gown, sitting near a great bowl of flowers, seemed to him to add to its value; his father, standing over her, in the light tweed suit in which he had been travelling, seemed slightly out of place. It was a room in which, if you occupied it in the evening, you ought to be dressed for the evening.

This impression, however, was momentary, for a stronger one immediately took its place. He had expected to see his father considerably disturbed, and his mother disturbed too, but by this time less so than his sharp eyes had made her out to be when she had said good-bye to his aunt and cousins. For she was a queller of disturbance, in herself and others, and might by this be expected to have made her mark upon his father, though not perhaps to the extent of quieting him altogether.

But there were no signs of disturbance upon their faces at all, nor in their manner. His father was lean-

ing up against the mantelpiece, talking with some show of excitement, certainly, but with a smile upon his face; and she was looking up at him, not smiling, but with interest and sympathy.

Sir William turned round, as he came into the room. "Ah, Norman!" he said. "Here you are! I've been waiting for you. You come into this little affair, as well as mother and me. You'll want to hear all about it."

Norman sat himself down, with his hands in his pockets. "I always want to hear all about everything," he said.

His father laughed. "It's rather exciting," he said. "I really hadn't been expecting anything of the sort. They've offered me a peerage."

"Good business!" said Norman warmly.

Sir William laughed again. "It will come to you some day," he said. "That's one reason why I feel pleased about it."

"When the time comes," said Norman, "I shall grow a little tiny chin beard, like the peers in 'Iolanthe.' But I thought you were going to be a Member of Parliament, father."

"Well, that is being a Member of Parliament—of the Upper House. Oh, it isn't—I've been telling mother—just a mark of honour for what I did during the war. They gave me a knighthood for that, which closed the account. They want me for something else now—a new business altogether. I won't go into the details of it now, but they want somebody in both Houses for it. It was just a question in which one I should be of most use, and

it was decided finally that someone else—I won't mention his name yet—should look after it in the Commons, and I in the Lords. It will mean a lot of work, but I don't mind that. I like work, and I really think I can do something in this job they've given me. I know I did good work in the war, and I've had the feeling sometimes—though I've kept it to myself—that enough notice wasn't taken of it. I don't mean in the way of reward, for I didn't do it for reward; but I thought they might have found me of such use that they would want to give me something else to do, when there's so much that wants doing. Well, it seems that they haven't lost sight of me at all; they have only been waiting for an opportunity. And now it has come. Yes, I'm very well pleased about it."

"So am I," said Norman. "And I'm jolly glad it has come in that way. If they had given you a peerage instead of making you a knight, people might have said you had paid out cash for it. They wouldn't have said it to you, but they might have said it to me. Fellows will say anything to you nowadays; it's the modern technique. I shall be an Honourable, I suppose. I shall have to put up with a lot because of that. But I shall live it down in time. When is it coming off, father?"

Sir William did not smile at this speech. "There's a lot of nonsense talk about buying peerages," he said. "I've been saying to mother, only just now, that I doubt whether there has ever been a single instance of a man putting down so much money and getting a peerage for it, or even a baronetcy. Or, if things were ever

done in that way, they're certainly not now. As far as I'm concerned, I'd just as soon have done what I'm going to do in the Commons as in the Lords. For many things I would much rather have been in the Commons. But it would have meant fighting an election, with a lot of time and energy wasted; and *that* would have cost money. On the whole, I am glad it was settled as it has been. You're pleased too, Nell, aren't you? I wouldn't have taken it, you know, Norman, without first consulting your mother—and telling you. I haven't yet, as a matter of fact, though I promised to write, either accepting or declining, to-morrow."

"Oh, I hope you won't decline, father. I didn't gather there was any chance of that. I've got rather keen on it now. Aren't you, Mum?"

She smiled at him and then at her husband, looking up at him. "I'm very glad," she said, "that they want you again. And I know that you will do splendid work, as you did before. It will mean a lot more work for father, you know, Norman; but it will be work that he will do well and enjoy doing."

"You never were a half-doer, were you, father?" said Norman. "I should think you would wake up the old Lords a bit. The general idea seems to be that they can do with it. What are you going to call yourself?"

Sir William's face lost its brighter look. "There's a slight difficulty about that," he said. "In the ordinary way I should take the title of Hayslope. It would be the natural thing, as we've been here so long, and—and—considering that Hayslope is coming to me some day. The trouble is that it isn't mine yet, and I'm

afraid the present owner might object. He'd have no reason to; but . . ."

Norman's ears were disagreeably affected by that phrase "the present owner." The dispute, which he had forgotten until that moment, was serious, then.

Lady Eldridge spoke, in her quiet firm voice. "I think you ought to know, Norman," she said, "that Uncle Edmund is showing himself hostile to your father. Father went to the Hall to tell him, first of all, about what has been happening, but there was a disagreement that had to be cleared out of the way first, and he found it impossible to do it."

Sir William shifted his position. "I've done all I can," he said. "The dispute was about a twopenny halfpenny affair which I've been trying to put right ever since. I've given way upon all points—more than I ought to have done; but it's of no use. Nothing's of any use. He's determined on quarrelling. I can't do any more."

"I suppose it's about that garden," said Norman. "What does Uncle Edmund want done about it?"

"What does he want done about it? I wish to God you could find out. First of all he makes himself offensive because I began it. Very well! I overlook the offence and I stop it. But that doesn't do. I'm told I shall be damaging his position in the place if I don't begin all over again. Very well; I say I will, when he has finished with the men I took on for the work, and he took from me for *his* work. Then I'm told that before I do anything else I've got to get rid of the man who has been doing it all. Something has come to his ears that

Coombe is supposed to have said about him. A wise man would have shut his ears to that sort of gossip; but because of it, I'm to dismiss a man who has served me well, out of hand, and without giving him a chance of defending himself. I said I'd look into it; but he wouldn't have that. To ask questions of anybody would be to doubt his word, though all he has to go on is what somebody told somebody else who told him. It's perfectly childish; but I'm not going to bother about it any more. I've got far too much to do. If he wants to break with me, he must. *I* don't want it, and I've gone all lengths to pacify him. But the fact is that he isn't a big enough man to be able to see me going ahead in the world while he's standing still. All his life he has considered himself my superior. He's my elder brother, and I've given in to him. I've given in to him over this, up to the limit. But now he asks too much. I shall just have to go on, and leave him out of account."

"If we weren't all living at Hayslope," Lady Eldridge said, "it would be easy to keep apart for a time, and the friction would die down. What we must do is to make the best of it until Uncle Edmund becomes more reasonable. Neither you nor I, Norman, need take notice of it unless we are forced to. Father wants us to treat it in that way."

"Oh, yes," said Sir William. "He can't visit my sins upon you; and I certainly don't want to visit his upon Cynthia and the girls. You must go on as much as possible as before. He won't come here, and I shan't go to the Hall. That's all the difference it need make,

and when we have gone on for some time like that, I dare say he will come round—see he's been making a fool of himself." He paused for a moment. "I know you're not used to hearing me talk of him like that, but I really can't help myself. I've been sorry for him lately, and have done my best to help him over the troubles and difficulties he has had. But none of that seems to count for anything. He was so—so coldly and obstinately determined to have his own way this evening that it thoroughly upset me. He seems to have nothing in him to respond to the feeling I have always had for him—no kindness, no generosity. I'm not used to losing my temper, but I'm afraid I did lose it with him this evening—his arrogance worked me up to such an extent. No doubt that will all be brought up against me. Actually, I came away without telling him what I had gone there to tell him. That will be brought up against me too. I really can't cope with it any longer. It's an infernal nuisance that this place, which would be more than ever a recreation to me now, should only be turned into a worry. But I won't have it so. I'm not coming down here to be plunged into little local bothers, which take more settling than any of the big things I have to deal with. For the present he and I had better keep apart."

"I'm afraid it's the only way—for the present," said Lady Eldridge. "But it is a very unhappy state of things."

Norman had listened to his father's speech not without discomfort, which was increased by his mother's acceptance of it. "You and Uncle Edmund have always been good pals," he said. "I should have thought

mother and Aunt Cynthia might do something together to put him right. I expect he would want to behave decently, if he saw the way."

"I'm quite ready to leave it to them," said Sir William. "If they can bring him to reason I'll put it all aside—any time. It's all I want to do. But there's one thing I won't do, and that's to dismiss Coombe offhand on his orders. I shall have him up to-morrow, and hear *his* story. And I shall ask that old Jackson what happened. I'm kindly permitted to do that. If I find Coombe has gone altogether too far, I shall consider what to do next. But I'm not going to be hectored and pressed to act hastily on a one-sided second or third hand statement. I've a pretty good idea of what did happen. Edmund goes down to find the men working at the garden; he examines Coombe about it in an arrogant sort of way, and shows him plainly that he's annoyed with *me*—he wouldn't mind that, though it's *lése majesté* to breathe a word of criticism against *him*. Then when he's gone, Coombe, who after all owes loyalty to me and not to him, lets something drop before men who take it up and make mischief of it to score off him —perhaps because he was getting rid of them, though he was acting under orders there. Oh, it isn't worth while going into it all. I'm sick to death of the whole business. Here we are now, going over and over it, when there's something of real interest to ourselves to talk over. We'd better go to bed, I think. I'm afraid I've worked myself up again. To-morrow I dare say I shall be able to see it all more calmly. I can't to-night."

When Norman went to his room he did not imme-

diately get ready to go to bed. The window attracted him, open to all the loveliness of the summer night, and he went and leant out of it, taking into his nostrils the scent of the dew-steeped earth, and into his ears the little noises that a nature-lover can perceive and distinguish, where to others there is only silence.

The world was so beautiful, and life was so full and interesting, that it was impossible for him to be affected overmuch by either of the factors that had just been introduced into it. The honour that was coming to his father he thought a very proper one, and he had seen that he was pleased about it, not only because of the work that it would enable him to do. Norman had no fault to find with that. It would be rather fun to call yourself Lord Something-or-other, though the thrill would probably pass off sooner than you expected. It would even be rather fun to be called "the Honourable" though that would no doubt pass off too—rather more quickly. That seemed to be about all there was to it; but there had been so many peerages created of late years that there had even come to be something to deprecate about such handles to your name. You were always coming across fellows you had never heard of before who called themselves, quite legitimately, "the Honourable." He would be one of them now, and he grinned to himself as he imagined the chaff to which he would be subjected on that account, and formulated a few of the replies he would make to it.

But he had soon exhausted the subject, and his smile faded as that other troublesome affair took its place in his mind.

He didn't like that at all. It seemed to contradict all the jolly things that were connected in his mind with his uncle, who was stiffer in manner than his father, but so kind-hearted underneath it all. He had never thought of him as he had been reflected in his father's speech, and it was difficult to think about him like that now, though he certainly seemed to be behaving in a way that could scarcely be defended.

His window overlooked the wooded valley that lay between the two houses, and the opposite hill. A corner of the Hall could be seen from it. His thoughts went out to his cousins, asleep there, and especially to Pam, whom he loved more than the others. He and Pam were as close friends as they had always been. He couldn't do without Pam. He always wanted to tell her everything that had happened to him, as he supposed fellows who had favourite sisters did. But he was not quite so sure now of her always adopting his views. She was getting together a collection of views of her own. How would she take this?

It was not necessary to accept seriously what she had said this evening about their backing up their respective parents in any dispute between them, and quarrelling with each other because of their quarrel. Her mother and his wouldn't do that. They would try to get at the rights of the case. There must be a right and a wrong somewhere, and it was probable that there was some of each on both sides. He had only heard his father's story so far, and Pam would only hear *her* father's. They ought to put their heads together and balance the two.

He thought over this for some time, and came to the conclusion that they were not likely to agree, which somewhat depressed him. Then he thought it over further still, and it seemed to him that the only thing to say to Pam was: "You and I can't get at the rights of it, so let's leave it alone altogether, and by and by it will right itself. And above all, don't let it make any difference to us."

Would Pam accept that, as the course laid down by his superior wisdom? A year or two ago, she certainly would have done so. If she didn't now, it would seem as if he had lost some of his influence over her.

Hoping that she would, but a little doubtful of it, Norman presently went to bed.

CHAPTER XVIII

FRED COMFREY

"Sir William Eldridge, who was recently raised to the peerage, has taken the title Lord Eldridge of Hayslope."

Mr. Comfrey read out this item of information from his newspaper, as he sat at breakfast with his wife and his son, and expressed his satisfaction over it. "I'm glad it has been settled like that," he said. "He will simply be called Lord Eldridge, and there can't possibly be any objection to it. Lord Hayslope would have made a good title, but under the circumstances it would hardly have done."

"I don't see why not," said Mrs. Comfrey. "It would be ridiculous of Colonel Eldridge to object, and he'd have no grounds for it either."

Mr. Comfrey was a mild-mannered man, who took his opinions upon worldly affairs very much on his wife's recommendation; but as she took hers upon ecclesiastical affairs chiefly on his, he never felt his self-respect wounded by her somewhat peremptory methods. She was a short, broad woman with a somewhat masculine type of countenance, which, indeed, had been reproduced with surprising fidelity in her son. She might have been expected, from her appearance, to be immovable in whatever opinions she did hold, in face of whatever opposition. But she was very apt to

weaken on them if they proved unwelcome to those with whom she wished to stand well. Perhaps if her husband had ever tried to controvert them he might have secured an occasional option upon views of his own; but he would have had to do so long before this, for by now she had established her ascendancy. Fred seemed to pay no respect to them at all, with the consequence that she often wavered before him. But they remained good friends. She admired her son, built in her own image, and, if he did not admire her, he liked her treatment of him since he had returned home, which was very different from what it had been when he was a boy.

Fred's whole attitude towards his home had changed since his boyhood. Hayslope was a college living, and a small one at the best of times. Mr. Comfrey, who had gained no particular scholastic honour, would not have been offered it if its emoluments had been enough to attract a bigger gun. He had scarcely any money of his own to supplement them, but his wife had brought him a few hundred a year, with which they had managed to get along. There had never been enough for anything but a skimped existence, and Fred had not enjoyed the same advantages as those of other sons of the clergy in the parishes around Hayslope, still less of the well-endowed laity. He had been glad enough to get away, at an early age, and not for some years had had any desire to come back again.

But after a time, his memories had softened. His home life had been dull and meagre, but the inconvenient, sparsely-furnished old house with its shady

garden gradually grew upon him during his hard exile; and all around it was the country in which he had tasted some of the delights which better-endowed youth enjoyed so fully. When he did come back he had money of his own. His mother made no difficulty about accepting a substantial payment from him for his board, which removed the effect of scraping from the Vicarage household arrangements; and he did pretty well as he liked at home, which he had never been allowed to do before. It was pleasant enough to idle there during the months of his convalescence, and to feel that he need not hurry them.

And there was the Hall, which had always provided him with an outlet into the kind of life denied to one of his parentage. If it had been a place of desire to him in his youth, it was a thousand times more so now, for it enshrined Pamela, who threw her sweet radiance upon everything about her.

For one who had lived roughly, as he had, and mostly with men for years past, it was a revelation of quietness and happiness to be taken in upon intimate terms to such a life as was led at the Hall. It was happiness of a sort that he had never imagined for himself. It was not entirely because of Pamela that he hugged himself upon the memory of those hours he had spent in the schoolroom, helping the children with their games, or of other hours in other rooms of the quiet, spacious house and in the summer playground of the garden. Love had softened this young man, not cut out by nature, it would have seemed, to tread the gentler ways of life. Love had transformed for him even the shabby

rooms and overshaded surroundings of his own home, since Pamela had enlightened them with her presence. He had thought of himself as staying there only so long as his health required it, and then leaving it again to plunge into the excitements of the career that he had marked out for himself. But still he lingered on, though now he was nearly strong again, and would soon be ready for the fray. He did not suppose that he would have any chance in the pursuit upon which his mind was set until he had something more definite than at present to lay before Pamela's parents; nor did he suppose himself as yet to have made any impression upon Pamela herself in the way he was determined upon. It would be better for him to go away for a time, and to come back every now and then with something done to recommend himself further to her and to her parents. But he could not bring himself to make plans to go away yet.

"Colonel Eldridge has never been consulted on the matter," said Fred, in answer to his mother's speech. "To my mind he has every right to object to the way in which he has been treated."

"It is difficult to get at the rights of the quarrel," said Mrs. Comfrey. "But we all know that Lord Eldridge, as I suppose we can call him now, isn't a quarrelsome man, and I'm sure nobody could call Lady Eldridge a quarrelsome woman."

Mr. Comfrey chipped in before Fred could speak. "I think it's a pity," he said, "to talk about a quarrel at all. There has been an unfortunate misunderstanding which I'm very sure will soon be cleared up."

"There *has* been a quarrel," Mrs. Comfrey pronounced, "and a pretty serious one. The two brothers are not on speaking terms. It's no good shutting your eyes to facts. I suppose we shall keep out of it as long as we can, but I think we shall have to take sides in it sooner or later, and I must say I'm inclined to take Lord Eldridge's side."

"Oh, my dear," expostulated the Vicar. "Don't talk about taking sides. I'm *sure* it isn't necessary. We've always been good friends with both families. Do let us remain so, I beg of you."

"I agree with mother," said Fred, at which she brightened visibly, but drooped somewhat when he added: "There's enough to go on, and I'm on the side of the family at the Hall, all the way and all the time."

"Well, of course," said Mrs. Comfrey, "you have had the Hall almost as your second home all your life, and I suppose it's natural that you should think more of it than of the Grange, which is new since you went away. But there's no doubt that the Grange is a more important house now than the Hall, which isn't what it used to be and won't be again until Lord Eldridge succeeds his brother there."

Mr. Comfrey made a deprecatory gesture, and Fred said, rather roughly: "What do I care about all that?"

"What I mean," Mrs. Comfrey hastened to explain herself, "is that with your way to make in business, Lord Eldridge may be very useful to you, and it would be a pity to go against him. Of course, if Hugo hadn't

died . . . ! What I mean is that Colonel Eldridge isn't the chief man in Hayslope any longer, and . . . "

She tailed off ineffectively, but picked herself up to add: "Norman has taken the place that used to be Hugo's. You used to be great friends with Norman."

"I hate Norman," said Fred, "and always did. I dare say Sir William may be of use to me when I get started. I haven't lost sight of that. But I'm not going to pay too high a price for his help. The people at the Hall are my friends, and I'm not going back on them."

He was not offended by his mother's crudities, having nurtured himself on crudities and practised them, all his life. Nor was he going to make her partaker of his secret hopes, or even, if he could help it, give her cause for suspecting his desires. "Sir William was quite decent to me, when I saw him," he said, "and Lady Eldridge has asked me—once—to the Grange since I've been home. But look at the welcome they've given me at the Hall! I don't care much for female society; it's never been in my line. But as long as I'm living quietly here, I like to have the Hall to go to; and I believe Colonel Eldridge likes to see me there. I find plenty to talk to him about. No, I'm not going back on them."

Mrs. Comfrey expressed her appreciation of the nobility of this attitude. It had occurred to her once or twice that Fred might be attracted by Pamela, but the idea had taken no firm hold of her mind. She knew that he was not a lady's man, as he would have expressed it, and besides, the difference in social status

between the Eldridges and themselves had always been accepted by her, although she liked to make use of such phrases as, for instance, that the Hall had always been a second house to Fred. The Eldridges, living now in a far more restricted way than before, had come to have less value in her eyes; but they were still a good way above the level upon which Fred would be likely to look when thoughts of matrimony engaged him. His reference now to talks with Colonel Eldridge confirmed her view that he went to the Hall for the reasons that he said he did, and not for the sake of Pamela in particular. But she brought in Pamela's name, just to see how he would take it.

"Pamela being so thick with Norman," she said, "I dare say they will do more to keep the peace than even Lady Eldridge and Mrs. Eldridge."

"I shouldn't count too much on that if I were you," said Fred. "Pamela takes her father's side, and she's quite right too. I don't pretend to know what she thinks about it all, because I haven't asked her, but it's my opinion that she's getting a bit sick of Norman's swank. He's always been a sort of tin god to those girls, and now they're older they're getting tired of taking all their opinions from him. At least that's how it seems to me with Pam."

Mr. Comfrey arose apologetically from the table. "I think I'll leave you, if you don't mind," he said, and as they did not mind, he left them.

Fred's speech had been unconcerned enough until it had come to that last word. He had not been used to calling Pamela "Pam," and there was just a something

in his voice to lead Mrs. Comfrey a little further in her investigations. "Pamela has grown into a very pretty girl," she said. "I wonder if there is anything in what they say about her and Lord Horsham."

"It's not at all unlikely," said Fred, in such a tone as to remove the last traces of suspicion from her, though for his own comfort he allowed himself to add: "I don't think *she* has any idea of it yet though."

"It would be a good match for her," said Mrs. Comfrey; which ended the conversation.

Half an hour later, Fred made his way to the Hall. It had been hard work for him to conduct himself thus unconcernedly with his parents, for something exciting was before him, on which all his mind had been working ever since he had last seen Pamela the evening before.

It was not true that he had not talked over the current affair with her. He had borne himself in such a way, with a mixture of reticence and sympathy, that she had first of all mentioned openly to him the fact of the dispute, which she had not intended to do, and had then discussed it with him in all its bearings. What he had told his mother of his being on the side of the Hall was entirely true, for he had shown himself such an ardent partisan that Pamela preferred him as a receptacle for her confidences to anybody else. So far, Colonel and Mrs. Eldridge had held to their custom of keeping their children out of such discussions. Their hold on it was already weakening, for it was becoming impossible to ignore the dispute altogether. Pamela and her mother had talked about it, but not yet without many reticences on Mrs. Eldridge's side. Pamela

and Judith had agreed that it was a nuisance. The children were supposed to know nothing. Miss Baldwin didn't count.

There remained Norman. Norman had behaved well about it, Pamela thought. At the very outset he had said to her that it was impossible for him and her to get at the rights of it, and that he didn't particularly want to. He looked up to his uncle almost as much as to his own father, and hated to think of either of them being discovered in the wrong. They, too, had better leave it out of account, and go on being pals as before. Then Norman had gone away on a visit, and had written to Pam, a long letter from a country house in which Lady Margaret Joliffe was also staying. He had written a good deal about her, but the most important of his statements was that there was another fellow there whose attentions she seemed to prefer to his. "My proud spirit won't brook rivalry," was his comment upon the situation. "I must be all or nothing. By the time I come home I shall be able to tell you whether I'm all or nothing." He had come home two days before, and had told her with a grin that his fate still hung in the balance; and she divined that that affair had passed its zenith, and would soon fade away like the rest.

Oh, if only this unhappy cleavage could have been mended, how pleased she would have been to have Norman back at Hayslope for the full month he now intended to stay there! His letter had been very grateful to her. No mention had been made of the trouble at home. He had written with his old-time affection,

as if she were the one person in the world to whom he could go with everything, and to whom he wanted to go with everything. At that distance away, what he omitted from his letters may have seemed of small importance, but when he returned it could not be so. It was bound to come up between them sooner or later, and when it did come up they could no longer be absolutely frank and outspoken together. Each of them must be very careful not to say anything that could arouse opposition in the other.

For a fortnight had passed since the brothers had met and quarrelled, and nothing had been mended yet, though attempts had been made.

Sir William had written to Colonel Eldridge the next day, telling him first of all of the honour that was to be conferred on him, which he said he had intended to do the evening before. He regretted exceedingly what had passed between them, and if he had said anything in the heat of the moment that had offended his brother he regretted that too, and apologized for it. He had given careful consideration to his brother's demand that he should dismiss his head gardener, and, as he understood the demand, without giving the man the chance of defending himself against the accusation brought against him, and had decided not to act in a way that he thought would be arbitrary and unjust. But he had examined Coombe upon what he was reported to have said and had no doubt that it had been much exaggerated. Something Coombe had admitted to have said that was not respectful to Colonel Eldridge, after he had come down to where he was working and expressed his

annoyance at what was being done. Sir William hoped very much that his brother would take into consideration the fact, of which he seemed to have lost sight, that the slight put upon him, Sir William, in this expression of annoyance at what he was doing was considerable. He had not allowed Coombe to repeat to him what had actually been said to him, but had given him a pretty stiff rebuke for the disrespect he had admitted to. Might not this be allowed now to close the account? It was a most disagreeable thing for them to be at loggerheads in this way, after all the years of close intimacy that had existed between them and their families. For his part he was ready to forget all about it, the moment his brother gave him the chance.

To which Colonel Eldridge had replied shortly that he congratulated his brother upon the honour he was about to receive, and that he must abide by the stipulation he had made before they could return to their old terms with one another.

Then Lady Eldridge had gone to the Hall, and had a long conversation with him and his sister-in-law. Cynthia had seemed to want him to give way, but he had refused to do so, firmly though not with the slightest show of temper. He had, in fact, treated Lady Eldridge with the most courteous consideration, but he had put her in somewhat of a difficulty. "I don't think William sees the situation very clearly," he had said. "I haven't so many outside matters to occupy my thoughts as he has, and I do see it clearly. Have either of you ever expressed to one another this idea

that I am jealous of William's success in life, which has been so much greater than mine? "

She had cast down her eyes and there had been an awkward pause, which he had cut short by saying: "That feeling has never existed in my mind, and therefore I can't have shown it. That's what's between us, Eleanor—that unjust and damaging accusation. William sees nothing more than disrespect in what his servant said to me, but I see that accusation defended in him, and as long as he's here, allowed to spread unchecked. William can only put that right by dismissing Coombe. It's no good writing any more or talking any more until that's done."

So Coombe remained the obstacle to at least a formal reconciliation. For he did remain, and it may be supposed that his tongue was not idle in the village, where, however, he was not liked. Colonel Eldridge was; far more liked than his brother, in spite of Sir William's open-handed ways. He was stiff, but he was kind. He lived among his people, and they knew that he was interested in all of them, though he was never hail-fellow-well-met with anybody. There was growing up a strong body of support for him, in a controversy into which the village folk had a far clearer insight than might have been supposed. If he had escaped the jealousy that had been laid to his charge, they had not, on his account. It was hard lines that the Squire at the Hall should have to give up this and that that he'd always been accustomed to, and Sir William at the Grange should be rolling in money. It didn't seem right somehow. And the Colonel had been out and

fought in the war, and lost his only son too, while Sir William had stopped at home and made money. No, it didn't seem right, did it? And now they'd gone and made him lord and all; and when the Colonel died he would step into the Hall, and Mrs. Eldridge and the young ladies would be turned out. And so he'd have everything, which didn't hardly seem fair, whichever way you looked at it.

That was the way the majority of opinion went, and when the affair at Barton's Close came to give point to it, crystallized into still sharper criticism. No wonder the Colonel had objected to that—money chucked away in cutting up good pasture, and more labour wanted for a garden that wouldn't be no use to anybody, while the garden at the Hall was run with two men short now, and the road through the park was getting into a dreadful state. It was generally supposed, and approved of, that Colonel Eldridge had peremptorily stopped the garden-making at Barton's Close. Quite right too! Time he stopped something! He hadn't thought of the men who'd lose their jobs by it; but see how he'd put that right! He hadn't wanted to spend the money on the road, but he wasn't one to see a man out of a job if he'd got one to give him. They'd work for him too, and at less wages than they could get working under a man like Coombe. Coombe ought to have been sent off for what he'd let out about the Colonel. It wasn't the way to talk, for a man who'd been brought into the place when there were other men there who could have done his job just as well as he could. Sir William would have sacked him too, if

he'd done what he ought. They did say that he'd quarrelled with the Colonel for stopping him cutting up Barton's Close. Sir William was getting a bit too big for his boots. That was about the size of it, and it wouldn't do him any harm to be told so.

Thus the commonalty of Hayslope, not knowing everything that had passed, and splitting no hairs, but ready to endorse in their Squire a more unreasoned attitude than he had actually yet taken. It was not suspected, either at the Hall or the Grange how keen was the interest in the dispute, or even that it was known that the brothers were keeping apart; for there was still coming and going between the two houses as before, and a great carefulness that no significant word should be dropped before the servants. But Pamela, going about in the village, had sensed the feeling of expectation. Coombe, she felt sure, was still making mischief. If only Uncle William would send him away, there might be a chance of their all settling down again.

Treading very delicately, she put it to Norman. Couldn't they do something to find out what was going on? Uncle William wouldn't believe that Coombe had made mischief. But if it was proved to him that he had!

Norman took refuge in their compact, but in defence of it made it plain that he thought her father's demand unreasonable. This warned her that she mustn't look to him for any help now. He was on his father's side, as she was on hers. She couldn't blame him, but it was good-bye, for the present, to the freedom and confidence that had always existed between

them. She felt sad, when he had left her, but a little hurt with him too, because he had failed her.

Fred wouldn't fail her. He showed himself eager to help her in any way that she might suggest. What they were going to do this morning was to see old Jackson together, and get from him exactly what had happened at first, and what was happening now.

CHAPTER XIX

INVESTIGATION

Old Jackson was in the gravel-pit, half a mile up the road from the lodge gates, which made a walk long enough for Fred to have thought over with fluttering anticipations, ever since Pamela had asked him to see Jackson with her. It was she who had suggested that it would be better to talk to him there rather than in the openness of the park, when the carts had brought down their loads.

They started off across the park by a footpath which led to the road higher up the hill. It was not the first time that Fred had been alone with her, but they had not been for a walk together before, as this ostensibly was. "We're going for a little walk," Pamela said, her stick in her hand, as they met her father coming along that very path, and he seemed to see nothing to remark in the thrilling fact. "Come back to lunch," he said to Fred. "There's something I want to consult you about."

Colonel Eldridge had treated Fred with a courtesy that had gratified him exceedingly, and such an invitation would have given him food for pleasurable conjecture if his mind had not been full of something else. "Poor old Dad," said Pamela, when they left him and went on. "I suppose it's this horrid quarrel he wants to talk about. There's nobody he can unburden him-

self to about it. I shall be glad if he does to you. You must encourage him to talk quite freely."

Yes, Fred would do that. Things were going extraordinarily well for him. It was a great deal to have Pamela confiding in him. He would hardly have been undergoing this moving intimate experience of a country walk with her, but for the disturbance in which Hayslope was involved. If they were also to bring him into close personal touch with her father, they would be doing him very good service.

Pamela moved along beside him in the active grace of her young girlhood, talking to him quietly and confidentially. He answered her in the same tone, alert to make the response that she would have him make; but only a part of his mind was upon the subject that alone held hers. The rest of it was in a ferment of incredulous wonder and self-gratulation. He stole a glance at her every now and then and wondered afresh at finding himself in this sort of companionship. Everything about her was fresh and sweet and virginal. In all his mean experience of sex he had never thought to have been so moved by the mere proximity of such a girl as this; in all his selfish, uninspired experience of life he had never thought to have been thrilled by a pure emotion. She made him hate the thought of evil, and turn away with disgust from his baser self. If he was ready to plot and scheme to get her, and would not be too particular what weapons he used if it came to a fight, once having made her his own, he would tend the spiritual flame that she had lighted in him. Already he was a better man because of her. He knew

it and rejoiced in it, who had not previously desired to be anything better than he was.

They left the park and went for a short distance up the shady road, to where a track ran off among the trees to the shallow pit at the end of it. The rich red gravel lay in ruled banks and mounds where it had been dug out, and the men who were working at it were filling the two carts which were to carry it down to the park. Old Jackson was working as hard as anyone, as well as directing it all. He was a fine figure of a man, with his upright sinewy frame kept supple by use. His face had that delicacy of line and feature which is to be found among the true sons of the soil, perhaps as often as the result of generations of blue blood. His eyes were clear and keen, with a look in them not far removed from the innocent look of a child. Such men as he may take orders from others all their lives, but they never lose their dignity of manhood.

The carts were nearly filled. Fred and Pamela waited until they were ready to be moved, and then Fred told Jackson that they wanted to speak to him. Would he send the carts on and stay behind for a few minutes?

He gave the orders and returned to them, putting on his coat. "Have you got a pipe?" asked Fred, offering him his opened tobacco pouch; but with a glance at Pamela he refused. Fred put the pouch back into his pocket, and his own pipe with it, and began rather hurriedly: "Miss Eldridge wants to ask you a few questions. Perhaps you know that there's some misunderstanding between Colonel Eldridge and Sir

William about Coombe, Sir William's gardener. If you can tell her exactly what happened when Colonel Eldridge came down to Barton's Close, she thinks she may be able to do something to straighten it all out. She'll see you don't suffer from anything you tell her."

Some such opening had been agreed upon between them, but Pamela's brows came slightly together at the last sentence. "I do want to know exactly what Coombe did say," she added. "I know you didn't like his talking as he did about father, so I thought you'd help us about it if you could."

The old man looked away. There was something pathetic in his expression of patience and slight puzzlement. "I told the Colonel," he said slowly. "He's always been a kind master to me, and I'm glad to be took on by him again."

"Yes, you wouldn't like to hear him spoken against," said Fred. "Sir William wouldn't either, if he knew of it. But Coombe seems to be a clever sort of man in the mischief he makes, and he's persuaded Sir William that he didn't say anything that could be objected to. But you heard him, didn't you?"

The blue eyes came slowly round to Fred and rested on him again, and did not leave him this time. "I don't know as I want to make that known to all and sundry," said old Jackson. "There's a many asks me, but I say to them as I say to you, that the Colonel's been a good master to me, and I don't like such things said."

Pamela understood him and said quickly, before Fred could speak: "You don't want to repeat it, do you? I'm glad you don't. But . . ."

"But there are others who heard it," said Fred. "And it must have been put about all over the place. You won't do Colonel Eldridge any harm by telling *us*."

The old man's face changed slightly as he looked at Pamela. "Don't you go for to mix yourself up in it, Missy," he said. "Nobody scarcely don't pay attention to what that there Coombe says about the Colonel. He don't come from these parts, and we knows the Colonel." He turned to Fred again. He seemed to have found his speech now. "'Tain't for the likes of Miss Pamela to be mixed up in it. What comes to your ears here and there you keep to yourself, or say to others, and not to her. None of us who belongs to Hayslope don't want the young ladies mixed up in this."

Fred ignored the rebuke, which struck him unpleasantly. "Well, I belong to Hayslope too, you know," he said, "though I've been away from it for a good many years."

"What's for the likes of us ain't for the likes of her," returned the old man, looking full at him. Then he looked again at Pamela. "Don't you mix yourself up in it, Missy," he said, in the almost caressing tone which he had used towards her before. "I'll get along down to the road now."

He took a step away from them and then turned round again. "I said to young Norman yesterday," he said, "'if you want to hear the rights of it,' I said, 'you can ask Dell or Chambers,' I said. *He'll* tell you, Missy. 'I won't have nothing more to do with it,' I said. 'You can ask Dell or Chambers.'"

Fred's face wore a disagreeable look as he frowned after the old man's broad back. As a boy he had played with the village lads, and held a sort of leadership among them, but more because of his athletic prowess than from any recognition on their part of his superior station. The elders of the village, recognizing his rough clay, had paid him hardly more respect than if he were one of their own sons. It was plain that Jackson considered that no more was owing to him now. If not quite one of themselves, he was not for a moment to be counted as of the elect.

Had Pamela understood the snub that the old man had given him? He smoothed away the frown and turned quickly to her. But she was looking down, and on her face there was a frown too of perplexity.

"Norman has been asking him questions," she said.

"Norman," he said. "I wonder why. And I suppose he went to those other two men. Of course they'll tell him anything he wants to hear."

She did not quite like this. She started to walk along the track, Fred at her side, his brain working quickly. "I think the old man is right," he said. "You ought not to be mixed up in this—not in the way of asking questions yourself, I mean. Let me ask them for you. Very likely, if I'd had old Jackson alone, I could have got something out of him. I'm quite sure I can out of those other two, and it's important I should, now that the enemy has got to work."

She looked at him with an expression that he had not seen on her face before, and instantly regretted having called up. "Norman isn't an enemy," she said. "If he

has been asking questions, it is because he wants to get it all cleared up, as much as we do."

"Oh, yes," he said evenly. "I didn't mean anything else. But it would be only natural that he should want to see his father justified. Much better get at it from another side. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll see these men in their dinner hour. I don't suppose it will take very long to get it out of them. Then I'll come straight up to the Hall, and I shall be able to tell you before lunch."

"I'm not sure I wouldn't rather see Norman first," she said; but she said it rather doubtfully. Norman might have told her that he was going to make inquiries on his own account, instead of saying that neither he nor she could do anything. Fred had offended her in calling him the enemy, but he was probably right in attributing some bias to Norman. She did not disguise from herself her own bias, and when Fred said again that it would be better to get the story for themselves, she acquiesced.

"I'll go now," he said, when they came to the gate that led into the park. "It's nearly a quarter to twelve, and I shall catch them coming back. I want to go home first."

It cost him something to leave her; there would have been plenty of time to walk with her to the Hall and back to the village by twelve o'clock. But he knew he could not trust himself to hide his antagonism to Norman, if she were to discuss his intervention further. He did not want to arouse that defensive and offended look in her face again. When he next met her he

expected to have firmer ground under his feet. She was already a little doubtful of Norman. He wasn't in the least doubtful. Of course Norman was gathering material for his side; if not he would have told Pamela what he was going to do. Probably he would tell her, when he had done it; but Fred would have told her first. He had a score to wipe off against Norman.

He did not go to the Vicarage, but to the Hayslope Arms, where he was quite accustomed to making himself at home. On his first arrival at Hayslope he had frequented it, picking up old acquaintances there, and establishing himself as one who had made his way in the world but had not become proud on that account. The men who had been boys with him liked him well enough, and he was free with his money. When all his thoughts had become centred on Pamela, he had left off going there; the contrast between what had satisfied him in the way of company and what was open to him at the Hall was too great. He felt some slight repugnance now as he entered the sanded bar; but he was keen in spite of it, for he realized that the book of the village gossip was open to him whenever he liked to dip into it, and that if he had not of late cut himself off from his old associates he might have had much material to manipulate. But it would be easy to pick it all up, and Norman had no such chances, though those who came in contact with him liked him.

Pamela took a book into the garden, to a seat which commanded a view of the drive, and waited with what patience she could muster. She felt a little guilty, but allowed no patience with herself over that. It seemed

to be she alone who could straighten out this tangle, which was making her father so sad that it wrung her heart to see him. His dejected look when he thought himself unobserved, still more his forced cheerfulness with his children—oh, it was sad to see! And she loved him; she thought she loved him better than anybody in the world, better even than her mother, over whom she was rather puzzled at this time. Her mother never allowed herself to be unduly perturbed about anything, and met her own troubles with a whimsical philosophy which Pamela had admired greatly, since she had been old enough to see that they were such as many women would have made themselves miserable over. Certainly she had lightened the burdens that her husband had had to bear, by showing herself happy with what was left to her, and encouraging her children to do the same. She and Pam had often talked that over together. They were never to let him see that they missed anything, and her mother would never acknowledge to her that she did miss anything.

But in this new trouble that admirable spirit of cheerfulness hardly seemed adequate, or even suitable. Pam knew that her mother and her aunt had essayed to put it right, but not having been able to do so they seemed to accept it, and to want as much to be together as before. Pam was beginning to think that such an intimacy could only be possible if it was agreed that neither side was more worthy of blame than the other. Did her mother take that view? Pamela couldn't. There might be two sides to the quarrel, but what mattered was that it bore far more hardly upon the one

than upon the other. She had seen that quite plainly for herself. Her father was depressed and saddened by it. Her uncle seemed to have put it aside altogether. He had been more than usually kind and affectionate to her on the one occasion on which she had been to the Grange since the split, obviously with the intention of showing himself so. But he had also been in more than usual high spirits. Of course he was pleased about his peerage and all that! And it was nice of him —perhaps—to want to show her that the quarrel had made no difference in his feelings towards any of them, except one. But she, at least, could not dissociate herself from that one; it seemed a disloyalty to go to the Grange and to be treated by Uncle William as if nothing had happened, while he stayed at home, alone and sad, because so much had happened. Uncle William was far more free with his expressions of affection than her father had ever been. His manner to his brother had always seemed to show great affection, and she had never doubted that he felt it towards him. But it was he who was showing himself almost unaffected by the estrangement, while her father was feeling it deeply.

The decision was growing up in her mind to talk to her uncle herself. That was why she wanted to find out more than she knew already of what had actually happened. She knew that her father made a point of Coombe's dismissal. If she could go to him and tell him why she thought he ought to give way . . .! It would be greatly daring, on the ground she had always occupied with him, when apparently her mother,

who must have made some appeal, had failed to move him. But she knew that her mother had taken no steps to find justification for her father's attitude. Nobody seemed to have thought of doing that except herself—unless it was Norman. But she could not be sure of Norman, yet, though she was quite unwilling to take Fred's view of his investigations.

She saw Fred's figure top the little rise in the drive which hid the lodge from where she was sitting, and her eyes rested upon it as it approached and grew larger, with a gaze of inquiry, almost of exploration. She had not been unaffected by Norman's freely expressed dislike of Fred; but in a matter of this sort she must abide by her own knowledge and observation. Fred had been rather a horrid sort of boy, but that ought not to tell against him if he had turned himself into rather a good sort of man. She thought he had, though there seemed to be a common streak in him which slightly offended her sometimes. But surely a man who was not "nice," after all the hard experiences he had undergone, would not have shown himself so appreciative of the quiet domestic life that they lived at the Hall. She knew, of course, that he admired her, and probably frequented the Hall largely on her account. But his liking had never shown itself in a way to make her take counsel of herself; and that was another point in his favour. Her father liked him, and evidently trusted him, or he would not have wanted to consult him about something, as he was about to do. And he was wholehearted in his defence of her father. That was more in his favour than anything else. It was enough, at any

rate, for the present. She rose and went to meet him, not without eagerness.

They went back to her seat and he told her what he had discovered, but not how or where he had discovered it.

The gist of it—very carefully imparted, so that at no point could she take umbrage at it—was that Norman had been making his inquiries with the quite obvious intention of proving that nothing had been said that it was worth making such a fuss about. The two men, indeed, who did not belong to the village, now denied stoutly that Coombe had gone beyond a very mild protest at the work being stopped. They seemed to be in with Coombe again and it was quite likely that they were expecting well-paid work from him, when they had got through with their present job. Their denials had been so obviously insincere that it was scarcely worth while wasting time with them. Fred would not suggest who had primed them, but it was quite plain that they were saying only what they were expected to say, and would stick to it.

"If it is so," Pam said, "it must be Coombe who is priming them. Of course he would want as little made of it as possible."

Fred thought this very likely—with a reluctant air that seemed to indicate that he knew better, but didn't want to say so.

"Pegg, the other man, tells a different story," he said, and repeated to her some of the things that had been said by Coombe about her father, which made her blush hot with resentment. "Did Norman talk to him?" she asked.

"Yes."

"And did he tell him that?"

"Well, no, he didn't."

"Why not? Do tell me everything." She was becoming impatient over his hesitations.

He plumped it out: "Because he saw that it wouldn't be well received. These men know on which side their bread's buttered, and they are not going to give themselves away. Even old Jackson—he's working for your father now, and hopes to be kept on, but he doesn't want to offend Sir William. None of them do. Pegg hopes to be kept on here too, I think, and he doesn't mind giving Coombe away, but he isn't going to give him away to Norman. That's how it is, and it's no good hiding it. I don't know what Norman really wants, but it's quite plain what these men *think* he wants, and that's to back up his side of the quarrel. Everybody knows there is a quarrel now, and nearly everybody is on our side. I've found that out. I think you must leave Norman out of it, if you're to do any good."

She thought this over, but made no reply. "Is Coombe still making mischief?" she asked.

"He's rather frightened, I think, and has kept his mouth shut lately; but everybody knows that he would do Colonel Eldridge any injury that he could. They think he ought to be got rid of. He's a bad influence in the place."

Pamela rose. "It's nearly lunch time," she said. "Thank you very much for helping me. I must think what to do."

CHAPTER XX

A QUESTION OF FINANCE

"I WANTED to ask your advice."

Colonel Eldridge stood in front of the empty fireplace, filling his pipe; Fred was in one of the shabby leather easy chairs, smoking a cigarette. The room was very quiet and retired, looking on to a corner of lawn surrounded by banked rhododendrons; under the shade of a great hornbeam.

Colonel Eldridge seemed to have some difficulty in coming to the point. He put the lid carefully on his old lead tobacco box, and lit his pipe from a box of matches on the mantelpiece before he spoke again.

"You and Hugo were friends together as boys," he said.

"Oh, yes. And we wrote to one another once or twice after I went abroad. I only just missed him once when we were on the Somme. I wish I'd seen him before he was killed."

"Well, I don't suppose you know that he gave us a lot of trouble, poor fellow. At least, you may have heard something. I needn't go into it all; it was mostly about money. He was very extravagant, and raced and gambled and all that. He was young; he'd have got over it in time, and settled down, I've no doubt. He did his job well enough; I've got a letter from his Colonel, which I was very glad to have."

He went on for a time, again apparently finding it difficult to come to the point. He did so suddenly, and it was not exactly the point that Fred had anticipated, from his introduction.

"The fact is, I want to raise some money," he said, "four hundred pounds."

"Yes," said Fred, at random. "That ought to be easy enough."

"Well, it isn't so easy in these days." He sat down in the chair opposite to Fred's, and spoke with more freedom now. "I've paid a good deal on Hugo's account," he said. "Claims have kept coming in, and I thought we had come to the end of them. But I had another a few days ago. I've been puzzling my head how I was to meet it. I've got to meet it, in fact I've undertaken to do so early next week. I don't want to go to my lawyers."

He came to a stop again. Fred's thoughts were very busy. What was going to be asked of him? Why couldn't Colonel Eldridge go to his lawyers about a sum so small as this for a man of his property? He had no words at his command for the moment. His business instincts and habits were too strong for him not to feel slightly, though unwillingly, on the defensive.

But fortunately none were required of him just yet. "I don't know what to tell you first," Colonel Eldridge said. "Perhaps I'd better tell you everything, though I'll keep back names."

He took a letter out of his pocket, and opened it. Fred cast surreptitious glances, but the letter was held so that he could not see it.

"This is from the mother of a brother officer of Hugo's, who was killed—some time after he was. She has found among his papers an I. O. U. of Hugo's for four hundred pounds; she encloses it. She writes quite nicely. She has kept it some time, not knowing quite what to do about it. She doesn't want the money; but she thinks it ought to be paid. She would give it to some charity in her son's name."

"An I. O. U.?" said Fred. "I suppose you've satisfied yourself—"

Colonel Eldridge cut him short. "Oh, I quite agree with her," he said. "I don't know her, by the by, and I suppose Hugo didn't either, or she would have said something about him—not only in connection with this, I mean. There's no need to ask what the transaction was. Very likely, I'm afraid, it was a card debt, or something of that sort. Anyhow, the money was owing from him, and is owing from me now. Her way of dealing with it is the best. I've promised to send her a cheque next week."

It seemed to Fred foolish to have done so, but it was no good saying that. "There's nothing, I suppose, to come out to Hugo's detriment," he said. "If you pay it without question it ought to be understood that it isn't talked about."

"As far as she is concerned, I should think she'd want it talked about as little as I should. If they were gambling together it might just as well have been her son who had owed it. But you've put your finger on the trouble, as it happens. *I* don't want it talked about, outside this room. The fact is that poor Hugo's de-

linquencies have brought about a state of feeling towards him that gives me great pain. He did some very foolish things—bad things, you may say, if you like—and they've been exaggerated into things that he never would have done. I quarrelled with one of my oldest friends about it. He took back what he said, and we've come together again, I'm glad to say. I've got Hugo's good name to consider. My brother William has known everything so far, and he has been very good about it. I've had to raise money to pay off what has been owing—it's a very large sum in all—and I couldn't have done it without his co-operation, now that he's in remainder to this property. But I know quite well that he takes a worse view of Hugo than I think he's justified in taking. I can't—I simply can't go to him about this, though it's a mere flea-bite compared to what has had to be paid already."

He seemed to have forgotten for the moment that he had cut himself off from going to his brother about anything. And he had not told Fred that the date upon the claim he had to meet was that same black date as had seen the transaction over which Lord Crowborough had brought his disgraceful accusations against Hugo—accusations which he had been forced to withdraw. The hornet's nest must not be stirred again. "No, he mustn't know of this," he said. "And my lawyers mustn't know of it, for if they did, he would."

"You couldn't—?"

"My dear Fred, I've been so confoundedly hit by the war, and all this coming on the top of it, that I simply couldn't raise a hundred pounds at this moment, let

alone four hundred, without some sort of property adjustment. And that would mean disclosing everything, which I won't do if I can possibly help it. But I've thought of this. I'm always getting money-lender's circulars. You know the sort of things, of course. I'm not such a fool as to suppose that I can borrow money in that way on anything like an ordinary rate of interest. But I'd pay very heavily to get this money at once, with no security but my word for repayment. Have you ever had any dealings with these people? I know young fellows do. I might quite well have done it myself, but as a matter of fact I never did. Hugo did, and they fleeced him unmercifully. I don't want to be fleeced; but I can do what they always seem to want, and that is pay by regular instalments. My income is pretty well fixed now for some time to come. It's a tight fit already, and this will make it tighter, but what I can do is to pay two hundred a year until I've cleared it off, with the interest."

Fred was ready with his answer. His brain worked quickly in questions of this kind, and he knew his man—or thought he did.

"Don't go to those sharks," he said. "It's perfectly easy. I can find you the money at once. The interest would have to be ten per cent, I think, but—"

"I don't want *you* to lend me the money, you know."

Fred had thought that he did, and thought so still. But, of course, a man in his position would want the decencies observed. "I hadn't thought of that," he said. "But as a matter of fact it would suit me very well to do it. I've got rather more than that lying idle

—gratuities, and so on—and I couldn't get ten per cent on it without taking some trouble, and even then it would be more risky than this. Really, it would be the easiest way, sir, and I should be glad of the opportunity."

"Oh, you could get more than ten per cent, lending money without security. I shouldn't offer security, you know. To do that, I should have to go to my lawyers."

"Your word is security enough for me, sir. I couldn't have a better wherever I went, and I've been meaning to go somewhere for the last month or more. I'm a business man. I don't like having money doing nothing. This would be a business deal for me, and at ten per cent a good one. I say nothing about obliging you. It would give me great pleasure to do it, but I should think it rather cheek to offer it on that account."

Under all the circumstances, known to Fred but unknown to Colonel Eldridge, it was considerable cheek as it was. One of the circumstances was that Fred hadn't got four hundred pounds lying idle, or even forty. He wasn't that kind of man.

"It's kind of you to say that," said Colonel Eldridge. "Let me think it over for a moment."

He sat upright in his chair, which was not a deep one like Fred's, and looked into the empty grate, with no expression on his face that could be interpreted. Fred's opinion of him lowered itself somewhat. What was the good of keeping up this farce? Of course he would accept. He was lucky to have such a chance offered him. And Fred was lucky to be able to offer it, to Pamela's father.

Colonel Eldridge turned his quiet direct eyes upon him. "It's a very kind offer on your part," he said, "For which I'm grateful. But I don't see my way to accepting it."

Fred did not understand in the least, but knew somehow that it would be waste of time to press his offer.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But tell me how I can help you in any way."

Again he looked away, considering. "I'm afraid," he said, with a little wry smile at Fred, "that I hadn't thought it out very clearly. You knew my poor Hugo. There's no one I can talk to about him quite plainly."

Fred didn't understand the bearings of this either, but he recognized a call upon his sympathy, to which he made haste to respond. His feelings were cold towards the memory of Hugo; and he was stirred to no generous impulse towards the man who had given him a glimpse of his loneliness and come to him, of all people, to relieve it. But he had done well for himself, with Pamela, in taking her father's side, and was being given an opportunity of doing still better for himself with him.

He said some nice things about Hugo in his boyhood, and laid stress upon the sacrifice he had made, which had wiped out all his errors. Colonel Eldridge accepted it all, but perhaps it wasn't quite what he wanted, for lack of the feeling behind it, which, if it had been true, would have brought balm to him. "Well, I don't want to throw his name into discussion again," he said. "Perhaps I shall have to. I don't think I could go to one of these people and bargain with him. I should make a poor hand of it. And I wouldn't pay the pre-

posterous terms that they seem to demand when you do go to them. It wouldn't be right. I'd had some idea that as you know about business, and all that, you might be able to suggest something. But I hadn't thought of your offering to find the money. I couldn't—"

"I won't press it," said Fred. "What I could do would be to find somebody who would advance it, on suitable terms. That wouldn't be difficult. You might have to pay a bit more than ten per cent, but I should try to get a loan for that, and I know I could get it for twelve."

He had absolved him from having angled for the offer he had made, and thought that it had been refused because it did not consort with Colonel Eldridge's dignity to accept a loan from him. He "knew about business, and all that." He recognized the attitude of a man to whom all transactions outside those of which he had personal knowledge were a mystery known to the elect, of whom he was considered one. In face of that child-like ignorance it would be easy enough to arrange this affair.

"I should consider myself lucky in getting a loan at twelve per cent, or even more. Do you mean that you really could make it a purely business transaction—get me an introduction, or something of that sort? I appreciate your very kind offer, of course; but it couldn't be purely a business transaction between you and me. Supposing I were to die, before it was paid off—one has to think of that—the claim would come upon my estate, and—well, you see it wouldn't do."

Fred did see that, from Colonel Eldridge's point of view. It would be necessary, but not difficult, to hide his tracks. "All you would owe to me would be the recommendation," he said. "And I could put it through more quickly and easily than you could yourself. If you'll say the word I'll go up to-morrow and arrange it. I shall bring you down a paper to sign, and then you can deal straight with the man I shall introduce the business to. I shan't have anything more to do with it after that, and I needn't say I shall keep my mouth shut about it."

Colonel Eldridge showed his relief. "I didn't think you'd lift the weight off my mind as readily as that," he said, smiling at Fred. "I'm very deeply grateful to you. Poor Hugo! It's the last trouble we shall have from him, I hope. It's odd, you know, that it doesn't make me love the boy less. It's as if he'd come to me himself and asked me to get him out of a mess. I should have wanted to keep it to myself then. I don't mind telling you, as you've been so kind, that there was one trouble I had to deal with that looked bad against him, and this last claim might have turned out to have some connection with that. He had got in with a wild lot—I dare say most of them are killed now, poor boys! It's right to keep their faults to oneself, if it's possible. I'm glad I can settle this matter promptly, and get it out of the way—thanks to you. I'm very grateful to you, Fred."

He shook hands with him, and Fred left him, feeling rather ashamed of himself.

CHAPTER XXI

PERSHORE CASTLE

What was Norman doing? He did not come to the Hall on that day, nor on the next, and it was not until the third day that Pamela heard he had gone away the afternoon before. The close intercourse between the Hall and the Grange was lessening. Lady Eldridge had been left alone at the Grange, and she had not proposed herself to dine at the Hall, or asked any of them to keep her company. Pamela felt unhappy about it all. They seemed to be drifting apart, and nobody was doing anything to prevent it. If Fred was right about Norman, he was even acting in such a way as to make the breach wider. She had decided to say something to him about the inquiries he had been making, but he had kept away from her. That was very unlike him, and it was not in the bargain he had made with her. They two were to ignore the quarrel altogether, and be just as they had been before. He was not ignoring the quarrel, but apparently taking a hand in it, and he had gone away without a word to her, which she could not remember his ever having done. Perhaps he was annoyed with her for having admitted Fred into so much intimacy. Well, she had her own reasons for that, and to stand aloof from her himself wasn't the way to recommend his opinion to her. It was rather a relief to her that Fred had also

gone away for a couple of days, for she had not decided yet what she should do with the information he had brought her, and she had no inclination to discuss her course of action with him.

She went over to the Grange in the morning to see her aunt. She still had faith in her, and knew from her mother how troubled she was about the estrangement. But she had not talked with her about it herself. She thought she might, this morning, if she were given a chance.

But Lady Eldridge did not give her a chance. She was in her pretty room, busy with a water-colour drawing of flowers. She was pleased to see Pam, and kept her to lunch with her. They played the piano together and sang, and cut flowers from the garden and arranged them. It was just such a quiet happy morning as Pam had often spent with her, except that it was not very happy. There was the shadow over both of them. Pamela could see that her aunt was sad about it, but also that she did not want it mentioned. The terms they were on did not permit of her breaking through the implied prohibition unless she had had a firmly fixed purpose in doing so. But no purpose was yet fixed in her.

She learnt that Norman was coming back the next day, bringing two Cambridge friends with him, who were going to stay for a fortnight and read hard; also that her uncle was not coming down for the week-end. It was the third he had missed in a few weeks, and it was the time of year when he generally stayed at Hayslope altogether. It looked as if he were keeping away

on purpose, and she thought that her aunt had mentioned his not being expected as an intimation that nobody need stay away from the Grange because of him. It was a sad pass for them to have come to, and Pamela was not encouraged, as she walked home, by the thought that her aunt seemed to accept it, though not without distress.

The next day Colonel and Mrs. Eldridge, Pamela and Judith went over to lunch at Pershore Castle. There was a niece staying in the house, for whom the society of other young girls was desired. Pamela found her uninteresting. She was just a niece—of the sort who is to be found in most country houses, and unless deflected by matrimony develops in course of time into a cousin, of the sort who is to be found in most country houses. Some bright life was wanted for the benefit of the niece, who was bright herself in a niece-like way, and indeed seemed to possess all the attributes and attainments of a country-house niecehood.

They lunched in a vaulted stone hall, decorated with armour and ancient weapons, but Lord and Lady Crowborough, though both descended from ancestors who might have worn the armour and wielded the weapons, made it appear rather commonplace. Lord Crowborough was genial, and rather heavily playful with the girls, and especially with the niece, who responded to him in the way required, and Lady Crowborough, who had begun by being stately, soon thawed into almost profuse friendship towards Colonel Eldridge on her right and Judith on her left. Horsham sat next to Judith, who was inclined to be silent. Pam was on the

other side of the table, next to the niece, and his eyes were frequently attracted to her. He might possibly have told the niece how it was with him, for she made efforts to include them both in conversation. But it is more likely that, guided by some subtle instinct, she was, unknown to herself, preparing for the years of cousinship ahead, when Horsham would sit where his father sat now, and his wife, whoever she might be, would invite her to pay long visits to them.

She took Judith off somewhere after lunch, and left Pamela with Horsham. This was not to Pamela's liking, but she soon discovered that it was to his. She did not pay much attention to his conversation, feeling a trifle drowsy after the half glass of Moselle which Lord Crowborough had insisted upon her drinking, until she woke up to the fact that he was endeavouring in a tentative and rather clumsy way to make love to her. She was inclined to be flattered, because she had now made up her mind that he liked Judith better than he liked her, though he might not be fully aware of it yet himself. But she did not want to be made love to for the moment, however tentatively. It was too hot, for one thing, and even half a glass of Moselle induces a disinclination to mental effort when your preference in fluids is for plain water.

She staved off the pressure for a time by asking him exactly how far he thought it was from Hayslope to Pershore, and expressing doubt at his answer. If she had thought of it she would have asked him to fetch a map, and he would have done so willingly and proved that he was right. But he ended that discussion by

saying: "Whatever the distance is, I wish it was less. Then I should see you oftener."

This was no longer tentative, though it might be lacking in finesse. It was too much trouble to fence with it, only to have it pressed home. "Oh, my dear old Jim," she said, "I don't want you to say that sort of thing. Let's talk sensibly, if we must talk. But to tell you the truth, I feel rather sleepy. Couldn't we both drop off for a few minutes? These chairs are very comfortable."

Horsham was sitting up in his. They were on a terrace edged with a battlemented wall, from which there was a fine spreading view of the country that this ancient castle had once dominated. Men at arms had paced up and down the flags upon which the wicker chairs and tables were now so invitingly displayed, and if a fair lady had ever been wooed there by the inheritor of all the power and wealth that had been represented by Pershore Castle, it would have been in very different terms from those now being used by his descendant.

Nevertheless, Lord Horsham possessed, in addition to his quite modern tastes, habits and appearance, some sense, not to be confounded with vanity, of the dignities he had inherited, or would inherit, and a certain direct simplicity of purpose such as had probably had a good deal to do with advancing his ancestors to the summit of their desires. He passed over completely Pamela's very modern expression of humour, and said: "I hadn't thought of saying anything to you now because it's just a chance that we are here alone, and I don't know how much time there'll be. But there's

no sense in keeping back what's there, and I know my own mind by this time. It's quite simple. You're the only girl I've ever seen that I should like to marry—I don't mean yet; but is there any chance of it?"

This had been said, not altogether without intimations of nervousness, but with a weight that forbade the response of raillery. Pamela corrected herself, and replied: "I'm afraid not, Jim. I like you very much indeed. I always have and I always shall; but I don't want to marry you."

"I suppose you mean that you don't love me."

"Well—I suppose I do; at least not in that way."

"I didn't think you did, you know," he said, not showing nervousness now. "But don't you think it would come? I don't know much about how these things work, because I've never gone about trying to fall in love, as some fellows seem to do. But I did read in a book somewhere that women often fell in love with men after they were married, though men didn't."

Pamela allowed herself some relaxation in her attitude of seriousness and laughed. "I don't think it does to go by books in that sort of thing," she said. "Aren't you making a mistake in your feelings about me, Jim? I know you like me, and I'm very glad you do. I like you too. But we don't seem to be exactly cut out for one another. Really, you get on much better with Judith than you do with me. There's much more in common between you."

"Oh, I know what you think about me and Judith," he said, surprisingly. "I do get on very well with Judith, but it isn't the same thing at all. You've often

sent me off with Judith when I've wanted to be with you, and I've gone because I didn't want to worry you, before I'd said what I've said just now, which I've been meaning to say for some time. It's you I love, not Judith."

This touched her a little. "I'm awfully grateful to you, Jim," she said. "But I can't say what you want. And I'm still not sure that you really do want it. Perhaps I ought not to say it—but we are such good friends, aren't we? And as we've mentioned Judith—I'm sure *she* has no idea of such a thing, and of course she and I have never talked about you in that way—I really do believe that you like her much better than you think you do. She's a darling, and ever so much prettier than I am, and much more suited to you too. If you could once get me out of your head!"

He listened gravely, and seemed to be weighing what she said. "I've never thought about Judith in that way at all," he said. "She's too young for one thing."

"Oh, yes," she said hurriedly, blushing a little. "Perhaps it's rather horrid of me to talk of her like that. And of course I don't mean *now*. You're quite young too—not old enough to want to be married yet."

"I shouldn't *aim* at getting married yet," he confessed, "in the ordinary way, perhaps not for a few years. But there's no reason against it. When I've left Oxford, which will be in another year, I shall be settling down to work, and it has lately seemed to me that I could work much better if I was married—to

somebody I love, as I love you, who would help me in everything I did."

"Dear old Jim," she said affectionately. "Somehow, I think you've got hold of the right idea of marriage. With the right girl you would be happy, and I think you would make her happy too. But I'm sure *I'm* not the right girl for you. We'll go on being friends, though, all the same."

He heaved a sigh. "Well, I can see it's no good going on about it," he said. "All the same, I shan't give up the idea. I suppose there's nobody else you do want to marry, is there?"

"No," she said shortly.

"Well, then, I shall ask you again—when I've left Oxford, and am ready to start. Until then, I shan't bother you—not at all, and I shall be glad to go on being friends, as you say you will be. You won't tell anyone what I've asked you, will you?"

She hesitated. "I'd rather you didn't tell Norman," he said. "I like Norman, and I don't mind his chaff a bit. But I'd rather not be chaffed about this, because I feel seriously about it."

"No, Jim, I won't," she said. "I won't tell anybody until you say that I may."

Lady Crowborough and Mrs. Eldridge had retired together after luncheon, into an upstairs drawing-room, which had a still finer view of the surrounding dappled country than the terrace below.

Mrs. Eldridge was in a mood slightly mischievous. She had seen Lady Crowborough thaw towards her husband, whom she had probably designed to keep at

arm's length. She had not yet thawed towards herself, and this retirement to a room not often used, instead of to one with a more intimate significance, seemed to mean that she would be treated with all courtesy and consideration due to her, but not admitted to any heart-felt intercourse.

She talked politely, on the surface of things, and Lady Crowborough responded in the same tone, and as if this was exactly what she wished. She even appeared to be taking the stand of a great, but still affable, lady towards a country neighbour of less exalted position, which Mrs. Eldridge encouraged by due submission. But presently she seemed to be getting uneasy at the absence of the intimacy that had existed for years between her and this particular neighbour, and to be inviting a change in the tone of the conversation. Mrs. Eldridge did not respond to the invitation, but became rather more colourlessly polite than before.

"I always think that you have such lovely views from here," she said, looking out of the window. "We have beautiful views from some of our windows at Hayslope—not all—and the Castle shows up so well from there. But of course you can't live in it and have it to look at too."

"No," Lady Crowborough agreed, and added with a smile, as of one who was saying something rather clever: "Sometimes I wish we had it to look at instead of to live in. There seems no end to the expenses of living in a house as large as this, even when you live as simply as we do. *Everything* has gone up since the war. *Everything.* Don't you find it so?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Eldridge. "In our small way we do."

"Even clothes," said Lady Crowborough. "I'm really glad not to be in London so much as we used to be. In the country one can wear old clothes, and it doesn't matter."

"It wouldn't matter, of course, what *you* wore," said Mrs. Eldridge, and wished Pamela had been there to hear the way she said it. "In our position we have to be more careful. I find it difficult to dress myself and the girls nicely without spending too much on it."

"Oh, but you always look so *beautifully* dressed." said Lady Crowborough. "And as for girls, I was only thinking at lunch how perfectly charming they looked. They really are the *sweetest* looking girls, both of them; and so clever and taking too. Of course I always admired them as little girls; but pretty little girls don't always grow up so pretty. Both Pamela and Judith have. I'm not sure that Judith won't be even prettier than Pamela by and by."

"Yes, I think they are pretty, both of them," said Mrs. Eldridge judicially. "And they are looking their best to-day. Excitement always improves young girls, and they have been so looking forward to coming here, ever since we had your kind note."

Her artistic sense reproached her for having gone perhaps a trifle too far, but Lady Crowborough by now was extremely anxious to cast away the tiresome impediments of reserve. "Oh, you must bring them over more often," she said, "especially now we have my niece staying with us. I was saying to my husband

only yesterday, we don't see *half* enough of the Eldridges, and we've always been such close friends. There was a little trouble, I know, between my husband and yours, but that's all over now, and it never affected *us*, did it? Couldn't we arrange a little picnic together somewhere—just ourselves and your children? I should like Patricia to know Alice and Isabelle. They're not so pretty as Pamela and Judith, but they *are* pretty, and they're such clever and amusing children. I often wish I had a daughter of my own. I think you're lucky in having four of them."

Mrs. Eldridge allowed herself to relax. "Four daughters are rather a responsibility in these days," she said. "We couldn't do without one of ours, even Alice and Isabelle, who are perfectly hideous, but darlings all the same. Still, it's far less anxiety to have an only son, as you have; especially when he's so well-behaved, as Horsham."

Lady Crowborough felt the change of atmosphere, and all her responsive petals unfolded to it. "I don't mind saying to such an old friend as you," she said confidentially, "that we were a little afraid of Horsham's becoming rather wild at one time. But that's all over. He is taking life quite seriously now, though I'm glad to say that it doesn't prevent his being bright and gay in a way that a young man ought to be."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Mrs. Eldridge, and again wished that Pamela were there to hear her—or if not Pamela, *somebody* who could appreciate her.

"I should like Horsham to marry early and settle

down," said Lady Crowborough. "I don't approve of very early marriages as a rule, but in his case I think it would turn out well."

"I'm sure he would make a good husband," said Mrs. Eldridge. "His wife would never have a moment's anxiety about him."

"No, I don't think she would. And do you know, dear Mrs. Eldridge, I've a fancy in my head that he is thinking about it already."

"Really? That's very interesting. Is it your niece? She seems a very nice girl."

"Oh, no. Patricia and he get on very well together, but there's never likely to be anything of that sort between them. Patricia is going in for music; she has a very pretty little voice—you must hear her sing—and though she *needn't* do anything, you never know with a girl, in these days. No, it isn't Patricia, dear. I wonder you haven't seen something yourself; you must look much nearer home."

"One of *my* girls?" she laughed, naturally. "Which one?" she asked.

"Why, Pamela, of course. Judith is hardly grown up yet."

"And Alice and Isabelle are too ugly, besides being still less grown up. Well, he does like coming over to us, and we're always very pleased to see him. But really, I don't think it has got as far as that yet. If it had I shouldn't have asked which of the girls you suspected. He seems to like them both equally—all four equally, I might almost say. If it *were* Pamela, should you think she was quite good enough for him?"

The artistic conscience approved of this question, as carrying over the earlier tone of the conversation into the later. But Lady Crowborough had quite done with that earlier tone. "Oh, my dear!" she said in expostulation. "We're not *worldly*. You ought to know us better than that by this time. Besides, Pamela might marry anybody. *You're* not worldly either, I'm sure; but you would expect her to make what is called a good match, I should think. Besides—*your* daughter!"

Mrs. Eldridge forgave her everything. "It would be rather nice," she said. "I shall hate to lose Pam. It seems such a little time ago that she was a tiny child. I suppose she's a little more to me than the others, because she was the first girl. Still, I've got to lose her some time or other, and I should love it if she didn't go *very* far away. At the same time, you know, I don't think it's going to happen."

Lady Crowborough looked disappointed. She had always shown herself very much taken with Pamela, since her babyhood, and Mrs. Eldridge had known, all the time she was amusing herself with her attempted stand-offishness towards herself, that she had only to mention Pamela's name to turn it into entire friendliness. "I *should* like it," she said. "And I suppose neither you nor Colonel Eldridge would object, would you?"

"No, of course we shouldn't. One has to think of the sort of marriage one's daughters are likely to make, and we couldn't expect a more satisfactory one, for any of our girls."

"Well, there is the position, of course," said Lady Crowborough, with a slight return to her great lady manner. "But nobody would fill it better than Pamela —as a *young* wife, I mean."

A glint appeared in Mrs. Eldridge's eyes. "You would be able to teach her what she didn't know," she said.

"Oh, yes. There's nothing so very difficult about it, if you're of the right sort of birth to begin with. Well, there's no hurry. They're both quite young still. But I *should* like it to happen, I must say; and I'm quite glad we've had a little talk about it. There'd be no harm in trying to help it on, would there? If you and I are agreed, we might do something, of course without showing our hands, you know."

"Yes; you said something about a picnic just now."

All Lady Crowborough's petals expanded to their utmost. "Ah!" she exclaimed ecstatically. "A picnic. Now do let us arrange a picnic!"

CHAPTER XXII

A SUMMER AFTERNOON

Lord Crowborough and Colonel Eldridge had retired for their after-luncheon cigars to another lower terrace overlooking the garden slopes. Lord Crowborough felt it necessary to say something about Sir William's elevation to the Order which he himself adorned, but was not quite sure how his friend would take it. Vague rumours of a dispute had reached Pershore Castle, though nothing was known there as to the grounds of it. Perhaps Edmund Eldridge objected to his brother being elevated above himself. His prejudices were not always reasonable.

"I'm sure William will be very useful to us," said Lord Crowborough, expansively. "He's made an extraordinary success of everything he has done so far. A very capable fellow, William! We've plenty of room for men like him. A man of family too! So many of the people they send to us don't know who their grandfathers were."

"Or else they do know, and keep it dark."

Lord Crowborough laughed appreciatively. "That's very good," he said. "Very good indeed! I must remember that. Or else they do know, and keep it dark. Yes, you've just about hit it. There was a fellow I met a short time ago—I forget his name, which I'd never heard of, or what he called himself—impossible to keep

all these new titles in your head—but he told me himself that his grandfather had served behind the counter of a grocer's shop. Well, *he* didn't keep it dark, to do him justice, and I think they'd only made him a baronet, now I come to think of it, and not a peer. But 'pon my word with half of 'em it's just paying down money, and up they go. Hardly any pretence of having *done* anything to deserve it. Of course William *has* made himself useful. Nothing to complain of there."

"They wanted him either in the Lords or the Commons, as I understand. There's no question of *his* buying a title."

"Eh? Oh, no! Besides, such things aren't done. Nobody really *buys* a title. There's always *some* reason for it. With him there's a good one."

"Yes, but— People aren't saying that he has paid money for it, are they?"

"Eh? Oh, I dare say he made a handsome subscription to Party funds, you know. He can afford it. He's a rich fellow, William. *That* wouldn't be buying his title."

"It wouldn't be far off. Is it the general opinion that he has done that?"

"General opinion? My dear fellow, what does general opinion matter? If he's told you definitely that he hasn't—!"

"Oh, he hasn't told me anything about it. I haven't seen him for a month."

"Eh? I'm sorry to hear that, Edmund. I did hear something about you having fallen out. I hope it's nothing serious. You've always been such good friends,

you and William. You're not annoyed about his peerage, are you?"

"No. Why should I be annoyed about it? I should be if I thought he'd bought it—directly or indirectly—as you seem to hint. But I don't think he would do that."

"Eh? No, I dare say not. I don't know anything about it. What are you going to do about shooting this year? You haven't preserved at all since the war, have you?"

"No. William wanted to. We've run the shooting together for some years, you know. He was ready to pay to get it all going again, but I didn't care about that, and I can't afford to pay my share now. There'll be enough birds for a few days now and then, which is all I want."

"Ah, then I suppose that's why William is going off to Suffolk."

"Going off to Suffolk?"

"You didn't know? I thought perhaps that might have had something to do with your falling out with him—cutting himself loose from Hayslope, now that he's more interested in it—or ought to be."

"What we've fallen out about is— But I don't want to go into it; it's a private affair. I've told you that I haven't seen him for weeks, and he hasn't been here as much as usual. I don't know anything about his movements."

"Well, it came to me in rather a roundabout way, though as it happens I can vouch for it as far as it goes. I don't know whether I'm letting out any secrets;

but a man I dined with at Brooks's the other night, talking about how the old estates were getting into the hands of—I mean, he happened to mention a place in Suffolk that belonged to a relation of his, and I understood that William was in negotiation for it. Of course I said I knew him, and he'd be all right as a neighbour; but I said that he had a place here, and a property coming to him by and by, and I was surprised to hear that he was thinking of buying another one. However, he assured me that it was so, but perhaps he was mistaken. He certainly said that William had been down to see the place, because his cousin had told him so. Nevill Goring it was—no harm in mentioning his name. I can't remember who he said his cousin was, or the name of the place, though he did mention them both, and I understood him to say it was practically fixed up. You see William is *known*. People talk about him now, and if he does anything it's known about; often gets into the papers too."

"Yes, I suppose so. It's difficult to believe all the same, because he would hardly buy a big place without consulting his wife, and she's been down here for the last two or three weeks, without going away. We've seen her constantly, and she's never mentioned such a thing."

"Oh, you still see her?"

"Yes. There's no quarrel with her! There'd be no quarrel with William if he were what he used to be. However, I don't want to talk about it. He'll go his own way, I suppose. If it's really true that he's thinking of buying another place, I suppose his way and mine will diverge more than ever."

"Well now, my dear Edmund, can't I do something about it? You're both friends of mine. You're more my friend than William is, but still you're both friends, of very long standing. I don't *like* to see you at loggerheads, and I don't see any reason for it. Besides, it's an exceptionally bad thing in this case, because there's your property, very much reduced now I'm sure, like everybody's property, and there's William with a great deal of money—really a *great* deal of money he must have made, or he wouldn't have been able to—well, he wouldn't be able to buy another big landed property, as apparently he's thinking of doing. You *ought* to be working in together, you two, not drifting apart like this."

"Yes; I know." He spoke rather sadly. "But as for William's money, I'm sick of his money, Crowborough. It seems to stand for everything. What we've actually quarrelled about is a very small thing. I know that, and I'm not going over it with you. No, you can't do anything; thank you, all the same. It began by William using his money in what I thought was an unjustifiable way. All the way through, at Hayslope, there am I adjusting things to the new conditions, as all landowners must now-a-days, spending my life there, and doing more work than I've ever had to do for myself; and there's William just coming down now and then, and complicating everything with his money, throwing labour out of gear, not even consulting me in matters where I ought to be consulted, doing just what he pleases. He gets a peerage, and you tell me that the general idea is that *that's* owing to his money. He's

quarrelled with me, so Hayslope isn't agreeable to him any longer, I suppose, and he's got enough money to go and buy another big place, just to get away from it, though it will all be his some day. His money has altered William entirely. Now he's Lord Eldridge, and I'm just a nobody of a poor country gentleman, hard hit by the war. I don't mind that—not for myself, though I do for my wife and children; but you'd think he wouldn't want to be always ramming it down my throat—his elder brother, and the head of his family, in spite of his new peerage. If I were content to sit down and take his charity, I dare say we should get on very well together. I don't know how much money he has, but I dare say he could make me perfectly comfortable at Hayslope without feeling it. But I'm not taking his charity, or his patronage either. It isn't in me to do it, not even for the sake of my family, and I'd swallow a good deal for them to have what they ought to have."

Lord Crowborough's face had become serious during this speech. "Well, I see how it is, Edmund," he said. "I see very plainly how it is; because I've always felt about William—though I've never said so—that with all his generosity—and I think there's no doubt he's a generous man; in fact I know he is—he's not quite—how shall I put it?—one of our sort. I don't know why, I'm sure, because he is by birth, and upbringing too. I suppose he's what they call a throwback. The fact is I don't think he *could* have made all that money, and still be making it, I suppose, if he weren't different—different altogether. The money-makers are a type

apart, and they may make him a peer, and he may be a big landowner—anything you please—but the more he gets with that swim the more he resembles their type. That's what you're up against, at the bottom of it all, quarrel or no quarrel; and of course you're not at home with that type. But now, when you've said that, can't you make allowances? After all, he's your brother, and you've been good friends all your lives. Let me have a talk to William. Let me tell him that *you* don't want to quarrel, and—"

"Oh, you can do that if you like. I've no objection. But you've put it very plainly. He's approximating more and more to type. There's not much chance, I think, of our hitting it off again, as we used to. I stand where I did, and he's altered. Still, I agree that there's no need to quarrel with a man just because he isn't one's own sort. If you can get it on to those lines there may be a way out. I did stipulate that he should do something that I think he ought to have done of his own accord. He would have done it without question a year or two ago. But I don't care whether he does it or not now. It's gone beyond that. I shall never think of him again as I used to because he's not the same man. But there's no reason why we should live at daggers drawn—especially if he's going to withdraw from Hayslope. That's about the last straw. But I'm not going to make a fuss about it, or about anything else that he does. He can go his way, and I'll go mine. We're better apart now."

"If you feel like that about him—! Well, I'll see him and talk to him. I don't think it's quite as bad as

you think, Edmund. The fact is he's made a big position for himself in the world, and—"

"Oh, yes, I know all that. So does he. That's the root of the trouble."

The conversation was broken at that point by the incursion of several young people whose activities and sociabilities for the afternoon would radiate from this garden terrace. Norman Eldridge was among them, and with him were the two young men whom he had invited to Hayslope. These he had already presented to Pamela, and they were now on either side of her, while Horsham thus dispossessed, was making himself agreeable to other guests.

The hot afternoon wore on to the coolness of evening. There was perpetual activity of white-clad youthful figures on the tennis courts; some inspection—mostly in couples—of the ancient Castle, which stood massive and grim overlooking the gay expanse of garden that surrounded it, and as if it would never quite adapt itself to its present peaceful and defenceless state; appreciation of garden beauties—also mostly in couples; general conversation from groups overlooking the courts; play of teacups on the terrace; and a general atmosphere of untroubled youthful enjoyment, tampered by the less vociferous contentment of the elders who watched or took some share in it.

But youth is seldom altogether untroubled, even when in the mass it appears most delightfully free from care. Pamela, for instance, might have forgotten, for the happy afternoon, the cloud that hung over her home, as her parents whom it most concerned seemed to be

doing; the experience of a first proposal had not greatly affected her, though probably when she came to think it over alone it would seem more important than it did now. But she was unhappy about Norman.

Was he avoiding her? The idea came to her in the course of the afternoon, and grew. She was not entirely guiltless of a wish to avoid him, at first, or at least to appear to be doing so. She was not quite pleased with him, but her displeasure would melt if he sought her out, as he might be expected to do, and proved to her that she had nothing over which to disturb herself. He had more than one opportunity of securing a word or two with her apart. Almost invariably he had done so on such occasions as this, if only to share with her some laughing appreciation of the company in which they found themselves. He had produced for her inspection the first instalment of his promised supply of young men; the grin with which he had introduced them to her had shown that their conversation on that subject was in his mind, and he must have wanted to hear her observations, and to make some of his own. She was quite ready to oblige him, as a stepping-stone to an exchange of views upon a subject more serious, for her slight resentment against him soon disappeared in face of his evident wish to maintain the usual friendly relations. He did accompany her and one of his friends, who had expressed a desire to see the Castle—in Pamela's company—on a round of inspection, and was quite friendly and amusing. But when she was ready to make it easy for him to talk to her alone, he did not give her the opportunity, and by and by she became sure that he

did not want to talk to her alone. Then she retired into her shell, and showed him that she was displeased with him. He didn't seem to mind that either, and pretended not to notice it. He did his best to make her laugh, and it was unfortunate that once at least he succeeded. This made her angry with herself, and she withdrew from the group which Norman was so successful in entertaining. One of his friends—the one who had inspected the Castle with them—withdrew with her, but he found that the wind had changed and the sun of her amiability no longer shone on him. She detached herself and went straight up to where Fred Comfrey was engaged in conversation with the Pershore niece, and presently Norman had the felicity of seeing her walk off with him towards the retirement of groves unseen. Though carefully refraining from a look in his direction, she was fully aware of the annoyance he immediately showed, and was glad of it.

When she had got Fred alone she was inclined to be annoyed with herself for having been forced to that means of asserting herself, and wished she had chosen Horsham for a tête-à-tête. Her feelings were warm towards Horsham, who had behaved well under his rejection, and she had seen him eyeing her rather wistfully as she and Fred had passed him. Still, Norman would not have disliked that as much as this; and this needn't last long. Fred did not appear to such advantage here as at home at Hayslope, where his status was well understood and need not be taken into account. He did not seem to belong of right to the company assembled. He had, in fact, bicycled over to Pershore Rectory, with

the faint hope that the Rector's daughters, whom he knew slightly, might be going to the Castle, where he knew that Pamela was to spend the afternoon, and would take him with them. His hopes had been fulfilled. The Rector's daughters were "getting on," and could neither send away a young man reported to be eligible on the plea of an engagement, or give up their afternoon's pleasure. But he was inclined to wish that his plan had not succeeded. He had been quite well received, but he was not in flannels and could not play tennis; so that he never merged with the rest, and there was a sort of air of apology about him which did not show him up to advantage. He had never been to Pershore Castle before, and was apologetic about that, to Pamela, explaining rather anxiously exactly how he came to be there, and giving her the very impression which his explanations were intended to remove—that he had got himself in there on her account. This did not please her at all; nor did his way of taking her invitation to a stroll apart. She divined a difference in his attitude towards her, though there was nothing in his speech at which she could take offence. Her invitation was made to appear a special mark of favour, and yet one to which he seemed to think he had some right. For the first time in her intercourse with him she was forced to take into account his admiration of her, which she had hitherto been able to set aside.

She asked him, rather shortly, what it was that her father had talked to him about, for she had not seen him since that afternoon. To her surprise he said that it had nothing to do with the quarrel, and gave her to

understand that there were subjects which men discussed between themselves and kept to themselves. He said this in a half-jocular manner, not in the best of taste, and she had an uneasy suspicion that she herself might have been the subject of their conversation, but immediately rejected it. Fred seemed, anyhow, to be less in awe of her father than he had shown himself until now, and she did not like that, for she thought that deference was due from him. She was in fact, coming very quickly round to Norman's stated opinion of Fred —that he might have made a success of his job, whatever it was, and done well in the war, but he was an outsider all the same. She had labelled this view as snobbery, and Norman had said: "All right, then, I'm a snob. Let's leave it at that."

Perhaps Fred, not responsive to fine shades, but sharpened by his feeling for her, and under the uneasy influence of a false shame at being where he was, divined that he was losing ground in her estimation, for he suddenly plumped out; "Well, this is the last of holidays for me. I'm off to London to get into harness again."

That changed the current of her thoughts about him. As a bold adventurer on the sea of life he was worthy of respect, and good wishes. She gave him her good wishes, and he stoically refrained from asking anything else of her, though he would have given a good deal for some word of regret that he was leaving so soon, or of desire for his return. Still, she was charmingly friendly again, and he took leave of her, and very soon afterwards of Pershore Castle, thinking that his appearance there had not turned out so badly after all. He

had actually made no plans to go to London, or anywhere else, in the immediate future; his announcement of departure had been an inspiration of the moment. He would never get any further with her, hanging about Hayslope. Her tone towards him had shown him that plainly. He was a fool to have counted a little upon that surprising and gratifying invitation of hers to a few minutes of intimacy in the middle of a crowd, and to have tried to advance himself a step. And yet—What had it meant but that she was beginning to want him—a little, sometimes—as he wanted her, always. She might not know it, and she had certainly not seemed to want him very much when she had got him apart; but the stirring of her heart towards him, surely it had begun! He would go away, as soon as possible, and plunge into work, and every now and then, at intervals not too close, he would come back, and tell her of what he had been doing. She would miss him. Would she miss him? He hoped so; he thought so. He was not an altogether unhappy young man as he pedalled himself back to Hayslope.

But he had left behind him an unhappy young woman. Norman was furious with Pamela now, wouldn't look at her, much less speak to her. And she was without the conviction to uphold her that she had done right. Her eyes had been opened. She was ashamed of herself for having given Fred that mark of confidence. Norman was right. He wasn't of their sort, and it didn't do to go outside the pale for your friends. Neither of those young men whom Norman had introduced to her would have made her feel uncomfortable, as Fred had, if she

had given them an ordinary mark of friendship. Pamela had burnt her fingers, for she had wanted Norman to take her invitation to Fred as rather more than an ordinary mark of friendship. He had done so, and she was not pleased with herself, nor with him, nor with Fred. But of course she wasn't going to show him that. She took no more notice of him for the rest of the afternoon than he did of her, but she made herself particularly agreeable to the more coming-on of his two friends. But this wasn't a great success either, for the friend told Norman that evening, with the attractive candour of a friend, that he thought his cousin was a peach, but somewhat hectic in her mirth, which was exactly what Pamela wasn't as a general rule.

Horsham happened to be in Judith's company when Pamela went away with Fred. He found Judith's company soothing after the laceration of spirit he had lately undergone. He had conscientiously examined himself upon Pamela's statement to him about Judith, trying to look at her with the eyes that had been attributed to him, just to see if there was anything in it, as yet unknown to himself. Certainly she was a very pretty girl, and now he came to look at her more closely not really a child any longer. It would not be at all surprising if some fellow fell in love with her, pretty soon. But she did not arouse in him the feelings that Pamela did. She was a delightful companion, and as a sister, if he ever had the luck to marry Pamela, she would be very dear to him—he felt sure of that. Yes, in a way he really loved her already, but not in that way at all. He was sure of that also, and being sure

of it allowed himself to take his usual pleasure in her society, honest fellow that he was, without any misgivings of danger.

"I say," he said, "I don't much care for that fellow Comfrey. Pamela doesn't like him particularly, does she?"

"I don't know," said Judith." "I don't."

"You don't? Why?"

"I don't know why," said Judith, "but I don't," which was a thoroughly Judithian speech.

"Strikes me as rather a pushing sort of fellow," said Horsham. "I shouldn't have thought Pamela would have taken up with a fellow like that."

"How high is that tower?" asked Judith. They were sitting on the lawn in view of the Castle, looming above them.

Horsham told her. She seemed really to want to know. He thought rather sadly that Pamela had not really wanted to know how far it was from Hayslope to Pershore. Judith was sometimes more interesting to talk to than Pamela, or at least she was sometimes more easy to talk to. But perhaps that was because she was not so clever as Pamela. He knew *he* wasn't. But he had a good brain and was improving it all the time. He told Judith something about the course of study he was pursuing at Oxford, but she was disappointing about that. "I hate learning things," she said; "at least I hate sitting down to learn something. I like finding things out for myself."

"Well, that's the only way of finding them out, isn't it?—real stiff things, I mean."

"I don't know. Perhaps it is. When did Napoleon die?"

Such a question from Pamela might have made Horsham suspect that he was being chaffed. But Judith didn't chaff him in that way. He was obliged to confess that he was uncertain of the exact date, but would look it up for her if she wanted to know.

"I don't want to know the exact date," she said. "But the Battle of Waterloo was in 1815, and I suppose he was getting on then. I didn't know till the other day that his wife was still alive."

"His wife!"

"Well, widow, then. The Empress Eugènie was the wife of Napoleon, and she's alive still, and lives in England."

Horsham did not laugh, or even smile at her. He felt a little shocked, but would not have let her see it for anything. "Oh, she's the wife of Napoleon the Third," he said. "The Napoleon we defeated at Waterloo was Napoleon the First, you know."

"Oh, I see," said Judith hurriedly. "Yes; of course, I ought to have known that. I'm glad I asked you, and not anybody else."

This little episode remained in Horsham's memory. He was rather surprised that Judith's astonishing ignorance did not affect him more disagreeably. But of course a young girl might very well be ignorant of the course of modern history. He himself had not known the date of the great Napoleon's death until he had looked it up afterwards. Her mistake had had the contrary effect of making him feel rather tender towards

her. He quite understood that she was ashamed of it, and would have hated to be laughed at because of it. She had known he wouldn't laugh at her. That was rather touching. It was pleasant to be understood, and trusted, in that way. Dear little Judith! If only Pamela would trust him like that! Perhaps she would some day. He loved her very much, and that must surely have some weight with her in time. They were a wonderful pair, she and Judith. It wasn't often you found two girls, quite different, as charming as those two. Oh, Pamela was worth waiting and hoping for.

CHAPTER XXIII

APPROACHES

Lady Eldridge came over to the Hall the next morning. Mrs. Eldridge received her with bright amiability. On the surface they were friends as before, but the desire for one another's company was less. They had not quarrelled and would not quarrel, but each of them knew now that the other had espoused the quarrel, and that it was beyond their powers to end it.

Lady Eldridge had brought news. William had taken a shooting in Suffolk, and she was going to join him there immediately, to get ready for their first party, to which, however, she had brought no invitation. "It has all been rather sudden," she said with a smile. "But William is like that. It is very good partridge country. He heard that the shoot was to be let, and ran down to see about it. It seemed to be just what he wanted, so he closed with them at once."

"Lord Crowborough told Edmund yesterday that he was buying a place in Suffolk," said Mrs. Eldridge. "Well, my dear, it will be dreadful to lose you, but under the circumstances at present I'm afraid we shouldn't get much pleasure out of one another here. Perhaps it's the best thing. Are you going to move your furniture there?"

"But William hasn't bought the place," said Lady Eldridge. "It is extraordinary what tales get about.

He has only taken it for the season, furnished, of course. It's a very nice house, and his idea is that we shall go there this winter when we are not in London. But there is no idea of our giving up the Grange. I hope we shall be here next summer, and that everything will be happy again between us."

"I hope it will be," said Mrs. Eldridge with a sigh; "and I wish we didn't have to wait until next summer for it. Little things always seem to be happening to put us farther apart, and nothing ever happens to bring us closer together."

"There is one little thing that may help. William is sending Coombe up to Eylsham. A head gardener is wanted there, and he has got him the place. He won't come back here, even when our tenancy there ends."

So there was that trouble removed, but too late for it to have much effect. Colonel Eldridge, when he heard of it, expressed a modified satisfaction. "I'm glad to get the fellow out of the place," he said, "though I think the mischief he may have done is at an end. People here have taken his measure, and he doesn't seem to have turned anybody against me. It has happened to suit William to clear him out of here; if he had meant to satisfy me by doing it he'd have done it in a different way."

He expressed some doubt, also, as to whether Lord Crowborough's story wasn't true after all. "Eleanor hasn't seen him for a fortnight or more," he said. "She only knows what he has written to her. We know that the place *is* on the market. Very likely he

has taken it for a time to see how it suits him; and if it does he will buy it. He hasn't told Eleanor that yet. I don't know that I've any reason to complain about it, if it is so. I suppose he wants landed property to support his new title, and he wouldn't be content to wait for Hayslope. My life is pretty well as good as his. At any rate there's no definite point in dispute left now between us. There's no need for him to turn his back on me any longer."

"Wouldn't he expect you to take the first step towards a reconciliation now?"

"I dare say he would. But I'm not going to do it. What grounds should I have to go on? There aren't any. At the same time, if *he* puts out any feelers, I shan't reject them. For one thing it is getting very tiresome to have to arrange things that he and I are both concerned in through lawyers, and absurdly expensive, too. Of course that doesn't matter to him, but every penny matters to me now. There are all sorts of little points that a few words between us would settle, and I've got to make a formal business of correspondence with all of them. If he no longer has any feeling for me as a brother, there's no reason for him to treat me as an enemy."

He had not mentioned to his wife that Lord Crowborough was going to try to put matters straight between him and his brother, but it was very much in his mind. He was beginning to have an uneasy feeling that if he had held himself a little less stiffly no estrangement need have occurred. He had been right, he thought, in every point of their dispute, and his

brother wrong, but looking back upon it all there was nothing that should have led to an actual state of enmity between them. The results of that state were pressing hardly upon him. There was a great deal of business in connection with the estate to which William was now the next heir that had been made easy by their meeting so often and being so of accord in what should be done. It had to be recognized too that, in spite of his determination to carry out his own obligations to the full, William had done much to grease the wheels. If he had never allowed him to pay money that was not actually due from him, a considerable saving had been made in his own expenditure by William's ready, open-handed ways. He was not sure, either, that William had not actually paid a good deal here and there that was not strictly due from him. He seemed to have been clever in getting over objections on his part, and making it all appear natural and business-like. You might say what you pleased about money not mattering much to him, and about his taking a pride in playing the bountiful; but it would be ungracious to look upon that side only, and to ignore the undoubted generosity of his dealings, and especially the impulse to cover it up. It was that generosity which Colonel Eldridge was missing now, even more than the tangible results of it, though the lack of them was making his days dark and anxious. In fact, he was beginning to miss William, though he had given Lord Crowborough to understand that he could do very well without him for the future.

Lord Crowborough lost no time in putting his good

intention to the proof. He was seriously disturbed at the state of things revealed to him by his old friend. He had not thought that the quarrel had gone nearly so far nor so deep. In talking it over with Lady Crowborough, he expressed himself doubtful about being able to do much to mend matters. "William has put Edmund's back up," he said, "and I'm not altogether surprised at it. Still, Edmund is ready to make friends if William gives him a chance. At least, he is quite willing to meet him again; and if they come together I expect they *will* make friends."

"I think it is all very absurd," said Lady Crowborough. "I feel quite sure that Colonel Eldridge is in the wrong from beginning to end, and I very nearly told him so this afternoon."

"But, my dear, you didn't know anything about it this afternoon."

"Oh, yes, I did. I knew there was something amiss. It was as much as I could do to be civil to Colonel Eldridge; he is so obstinate and wrong-headed. She backs him up, too, though she pretends to be all sweetness and reasonableness. I'm sorry for her though, for I'm afraid they have very little money now, and are going through a bad time. I was a good deal more friendly to her this afternoon than I felt like, because of that; and I must keep in with her because of Pamela."

"Why because of Pamela?"

"Well, I hadn't meant to say anything to you yet, but I don't seem to be able to keep anything to myself. Jim is in love with Pamela. She's a very sweet girl, though her parents are rather tiresome. I don't see

any reason to object. Jim might marry somebody of higher rank or with more money, but we're not wordly, as I told Mrs. Eldridge, and if he has set his heart on Pamela I'm not sorry for it."

"You told Mrs. Eldridge? You talked that over together?"

"Well, and why not? Of course *she* would like it. As she said, with four daughters and two of them grown up, it was time to think about marriage for them."

"Did she really say that?"

"Not in so many words, perhaps, but that was what she meant. You wouldn't object to Jim marrying Pamela, would you?"

"No, I shouldn't object," said Lord Crowborough, after a pause of consideration. "I think I should be rather glad. Pamela is a very charming girl. But I doubt if there's anything in it all the same. I happened to notice that Jim wasn't much with her this afternoon. He was much more with little Judith, and they seemed to be getting on extraordinarily well together. Oddly enough, it did cross my mind that something might come out of that by and by."

"It's curious you should say so, because that is what Mrs. Eldridge seemed to be hinting at. She never says anything straight out. However, we shall see. She was very anxious that we should get up a picnic. I think her idea was to help matters on, though she wouldn't have acknowledged that. I shouldn't have taken to the suggestion if I had seen any reason why matters shouldn't be helped on. I should be rather dis-

appointed if it is Judith and not Pamela. But we shall see. I shall let Mrs. Eldridge have her picnic, and we shall see what comes of it. Then we shall know what to do."

Lord Crowborough met Lord Eldridge in London by appointment. He went up for the day, on purpose to do so. It was a little unfortunate that Lord Eldridge's engagements prevented his accepting an invitation to lunch, for a more leisured conversation in a mellower atmosphere than that of his office in the City might have led to more satisfactory results.

For the mission was a failure. "I shan't take any further steps," said Lord Eldridge firmly. "It's very kind of you to want to bring us together again, and as far as I'm concerned I'm not going to keep up a feud. You can tell Edmund that, if you like. But it's he who has created the feud, and if he wants it ended it's for him to make the advance. I've done every mortal thing that he has wanted me to do, unreasonable as well as reasonable, and it has been of no use. There's nothing more left for me to do."

"Well, there was something—he didn't tell me what it was—that he thought you might have done. But he said he didn't mind now whether you did it or not."

"Yes, exactly. That's how it goes all the time. I don't wonder he didn't tell you what it was. *I* don't mind telling you. I was to dismiss my head gardener, out of hand, at a word from him. I didn't see any reason to do it, when I had looked into the complaint, which I did do. But I have taken the man away from Hayslope, and got him another job, solely and entirely

to remove that cause of complaint. And now I'm told he doesn't mind whether I do it or not. Why, he made it the final cause of the split between us! He wouldn't come to my house again as long as that man was there. I haven't seen him since, and really, Crowborough, I don't want to see him. I don't know what has come over him, but there's nothing one can do to placate him. I'm not going to take any more trouble about it." He turned sharply round in his chair. "What the devil *is* it that he complains of?" he asked in a tone of strong irritation. "I'm just what I've always been to him. We've always got on well together up till now."

"Well, he says that you're *not* just the same," said Lord Crowborough, with weighty insistence. "And I'm not sure that you are, you know, William. Of course you've got a deal more money than most of us, and that seems to be complicating things at Hayslope."

"Complicating things! I'll tell you this, that Edmund will find things a good deal more complicated without my money to help him along. He's got no head for business, not even estate business, which he thinks he knows all about. I don't think he has the least idea what a help I've been to him over that. I've been rather keen that he shouldn't know. But now that it will all be on his own shoulders I think he'll find his troubles increasing on him pretty heavily."

"Well, do you want that, William? Do you want that?"

Lord Crowborough had scored there. "No, I don't want it," said Lord Eldridge in a tone that was

almost sulky. "At least, I don't want him to be pushed up into a corner. I don't think it will do him any harm to get some idea of what I've really done for him during these last few years, all the same."

"I know how generous you have been, my dear fellow. I know that we were never to mention what you did over that unpleasant business of Hugo's with Horsham, but *I* shall never forget it."

"I saved Edmund trouble and disgrace over that, didn't I? I'd have done anything to prevent his knowing what a young scoundrel Hugo really was. I was going to say, what a lot of thanks I get for it; but of course he doesn't know. I haven't told you, because I haven't seen you since, that I had a reminder of that business the other day. I tried to warn Edmund of what might be coming, but he wouldn't even listen to me. Apparently nothing *has* happened yet, and I hope nothing will."

"What is it? I thought that was all over and done with."

"So did I. But do you remember young Barrett, who was one of them that evening, and was killed at the same time as Hugo?"

"I remember his name."

"His mother wrote and asked me to go and see her. She thought Hugo was my son, as it turned out, fortunately for Edmund, or he would have had the story. She had found among his papers an I. O. U. of Hugo's for four hundred pounds, and a statement written by himself of exactly what had happened on that night. It was a pretty damaging indictment. Although I had

known it all through, it made me ashamed to read it."

"What kind of a woman can she be to want to show that to the boy's father, after he had been killed?"

"Oh, I ought to have told you that she didn't show me the paper until she knew that I wasn't his father. It was the I. O. U. that she wanted to talk about. She's an emotional, I should say rather hysterical sort of woman. It's possible she might have shown Edmund the paper, if he had been there instead of me; but she hadn't meant to do so when she wrote. She didn't know what to do about the I. O. U. She had thought of destroying it, but couldn't make up her mind what to do. I offered to settle it then and there, but she wouldn't let me. She has plenty of money, and when it came to the point I think she was rather ashamed at the idea of taking it. I suppose she really wanted the luxury of a little fuss, and if she was going to behave generously about it, to let it be known, at any rate to Hugo's people. I couldn't do anything with her except that I think I made her understand that it wouldn't do her son's name any good to have it known. So I suppose she'll keep quiet. I tried to make her see that it would be a cruel thing, as you said just now, to trouble Hugo's father. I told her that he didn't know the worst, though I did, and you did, and that I had settled it, as far as it could be settled. She seemed to accept it all, and to be glad that her mistake had prevented her from doing something she might have regretted. But I can't feel sure about her. He was her only son; she wants to keep him alive in some way. I

saw that she sent a subscription of a hundred pounds to some charity, in his name, only a few days ago. You never know where you are with a woman like that. I've done all that I can."

"Poor old Edmund! It would be a sad thing if he had to know about it after all."

"Yes; I don't think it will happen. I don't in the least think it will happen. She'll let me know if she wants the money. She practically promised me that. I'm rather glad now that Edmund did prevent my warning him about it. I had just come from her, and I felt doubtful as to what she would do. I shouldn't have told him everything—only something that would have broken the shock to him if it had come. But it's weeks ago now. She's apparently decided not to do anything. I think the danger is past."

"It looks like it; and I'm very glad of it. Poor Edmund! He clings to that boy's memory, though I'm afraid he'd have given him nothing but trouble if he'd lived. You've been very good, William, in keeping the worst of it from him. You've done it even since you quarrelled with him. Now look here—can't you carry it a bit further and make friends with him again?"

"Oh, I'm quite ready to make friends with him if he wants it. I've told you so. But as for taking the first step, which I suppose is what you want me to do, I tell you I'm tired of taking first steps. When this absurd dispute began, I put aside one offence after the other from him, and acted on what I thought was beneath it all—I mean the very thing you rely on—our always having got on well together as brothers and

all that. *He* didn't rely on that. Every step I took was made the basis of further offence. No, I'm not going out on that road again. If he wants me he knows well enough how to get me."

"My dear fellow, I dare say you're in the right and he's in the wrong—all the way through if you like. But it's a question of acting generously."

"I've tried to do that. But when your generosity is thrown back in your face time after time—! No, it's no good, Crowborough. I'm ready to put it all aside and begin again; but I'm not going to make any more advances."

With this Lord Crowborough had to be content. He made the most of it to Colonel Eldridge. William was quite ready to return to their former relations, but he was still sore about the way in which his efforts at reconciliation had been rejected, as he considered. Couldn't Edmund himself write something that would put it right? He felt sure that William would respond.

"I'll think about it," said Colonel Eldridge. "I'm not going to do anything in a hurry."

He thought about it very carefully. He wanted to have it over. William had said he was ready to have it over; but did he really want it, in the same way, or didn't he much care? His whole attitude now seemed to show that he hardly cared at all. He was leaving Hayslope and all his interests there, which had been much to him. Now, besides all the other interests of his successful life, they counted for very little, and he, his brother, was just part of them. If he were to put

aside his resentments, which still caused him acute annoyance when he remembered their successive occasions, and to make some advance towards reconciliation, wouldn't it be taken as just an indication that he had found himself unable to do without William's assistance and was ready to eat humble pie in order to get it again?

No, he couldn't do it. William would no doubt respond effusively. He would pretend that nothing had ever happened, and behave with that excessive brotherliness which he had always found it difficult to respond to, though he had valued it as expressing the feeling which he had also cherished. With the memory of all that would have to be ignored still fresh in his mind, he knew that he could not meet that attitude graciously—not for some time to come. It would be a false intimacy to which he would be immediately invited; not false, perhaps, on William's part, because with all his late offences endorsed, and the excitements of his life taking up most of his attention, he would be relieved to be able to give his impulses play; but certainly false on his part, who must have time in which to get back to the old terms.

What he would do—and it would be a great concession—would be to write directly to William upon some subject with which they had been dealing through their lawyers. That would be a beginning, from which they could gradually proceed to something more; and in time the past would be forgotten. It was the only way. Neither of them would be climbing down, and there would be no chance of still further misunder-

standings, from a correspondence about a dispute upon which they would never agree.

Yes, he would do that without delay. Perhaps the process towards complete reconciliation would not be too protracted. His spirits rose when he thought of that.

CHAPTER XXIV

ALMOST

They had just finished lunch at the Hall. Pamela was wondering rather disconsolately what she should do with herself for the afternoon. The times seemed out of gear. There was the Grange half a mile away, to which she was accustomed to repair if there seemed to be nothing particular to do at home. Aunt Eleanor was there. She had come over this morning, but Pamela had not seen her, and she had made no suggestions for meeting later in the day. Norman was there, with his two friends. He might bring them over some time during the afternoon; she had half expected that he would do so during the morning; but perhaps they had been reading, as they called it. Eric Blundell, the one who had talked to her most the afternoon before at Pershore Castle had told her that they intended to read very hard during their stay at the Grange. Norman had been excessively annoyed with her when she had last seen him, but his annoyance seldom lasted long. He would surely want to have it out with her! She would rather enjoy that. Anything to escape from this deadly blight which seemed to be settling down on them all!

She had stepped out of the window of the dining-room after lunch, and was standing there, when she saw Norman coming towards her from among the trees. He was alone. He must have hurried over his lunch, and

left his friends upon some pretext. Perhaps he had done that so as to have it out with her. She brightened, but did not go forward to meet him.

He waved his stick to her, in his usual manner, when he saw her, and there was no sign of annoyance on his face as he approached. That was one thing that was rather nice about Norman. If he ever lost his temper, as he did occasionally, he recovered it very quickly.

"We're going off for a joy-ride," he called out, as he came up to her. "I've come to fetch you."

"Who is going?" she asked, "and where?"

"Just we three bright young sparks, and you. We're going in Eric Blundell's car. She's a flier, but she only holds four, sitting rather snug, or we'd have asked Judy. He wants to go and see some cousins who live at Medchester. It's about forty miles there and another forty back, so we ought to start at once. Are you on?"

She was on; and soon they were walking down the wood together.

"I say, old girl," said Norman, as soon as they started, "I was rather shirty with you yesterday, and I'm afraid I showed it. I'm sorry. You won't have it up against me, will you?"

"You didn't like me taking notice of Fred Comfrey, I suppose."

"You've hit it. I always say you can see a thing as quick as anybody, and I'll maintain that against all and sundry."

He seemed to be in high spirits. It was grateful to Pamela to find him like that, and relieved some of her soreness. "Fred Comfrey is going away this after-

noon," she said. "He came up to say good-bye this morning."

"Did he? Well, we must try to bear up under it. Is he coming back to-morrow afternoon?"

"No, he isn't. He's going to London to start work again. So you won't have to lose your temper any more because of him."

"No. That's such an advantage, isn't it? I hate losing my temper, especially with you. It wastes such a lot of time."

"You're very foolish to have done it at all. You know I don't really like him much; but I can't treat him rudely, just to please you."

Norman became a shade graver. "I said to myself that you couldn't really like him," he said. "But I'm glad *you've* said it too. You see, Pam, when you think a lot of a girl, as I do of you—I mean when you put her high—you don't like seeing her make friends with somebody miles below her. That's really how it was when I saw you going off with that creature; but of course I was an ass to get shirty about it. You see, old girl, it means nothing to you. I know that. But probably it means a good deal to him, and you give him a handle. You can't afford to give handles to people like that. At least—no; I didn't mean to say that. I'm not going to lecture you about it. You do exactly what you like, and I'm sure it will be all right."

"Well, it's self-denying of you not to want to lecture me about it; and I think you can trust me too. Talking about it at all makes it of too much importance. So let's leave off. There are other things to talk about,

and I shouldn't have been sorry to have had an opportunity of doing it yesterday."

"Ah! Well, I wasn't ready to talk about those other things yesterday. Now I am. In fact it's what I came over to do, and I had some trouble to prevent those other lads from coming with me. We've got plenty of time. Let's sit down here and discuss the situation."

They had come to the stile leading to the meadows. Norman perched himself upon it. Pamela stood in front of him, with some indecision in her face. She was not quite prepared for a full-dress debate, and the afternoon's pleasure was in front of her. "I thought you said we must start at once," she said.

"That was camouflage. I told Castor and Pollux that we'd start in half an hour. I gave them two glasses of port each to keep them quiet. What I've got to tell you won't take long. It's chiefly that I investigated that business of Coombe for myself, as the governor didn't seem to be giving it enough attention. I think Uncle Edmund made a bit too much of it, because it hasn't really done him any harm; in fact, I think it has rallied the enlightened electorate of Hayslope to him. At the same time the fellow *had* tried to make mischief, and I think the governor ought to have sent him away for it. I told him so, in a letter written under my own hand and seal, and I got his reply this morning. I'm glad to say that he had come to the same conclusion himself, and Mr. Coombe departs immediately. So that ought to end it, oughtn't it, Pam?"

"I'm very glad you did that, Norman," said Pamela, looking down. "I knew you were trying to find out

something, but— Oh, I *am* so glad." She looked up at him, smiling.

"Dear old girl," he said affectionately. "You set Master Comfrey on to it, didn't you? Well, I'm not going to say any more about that. We can forget all the disagreeables now—I'm afraid I must continue to think Master Comfrey one of them—and be as we were. I think we ought to be moving on now, or Castor-oil and Pole-ax will be getting restive. I say, mother told you about the shoot in Suffolk, didn't she? It's a topping place. I expect the governor will want to ask Uncle Edmund to come up and blaze at 'em directly they've made it up. You'll have to come too. It's a good big house, and we shall be able to put up lots of bright spirits."

"Oh, it will be heavenly to get all this trouble over," said Pamela, as they walked on together. "You can't think how glad I am. It's like a great weight lifted off me."

"I know. They're both of them a bit touchy; but they're good sorts. I knew *we* could put it right if we took it in hand. I wanted to tell you what I'd done yesterday; but I thought it would come better if I could tell you that it was all finished with."

"Oh, Norman, I'm afraid I was rather horrid. I'm sorry. I'm sorry about asking Fred to help me too. But let's forget all about him, and about it, and enjoy ourselves. It will be rather fun this afternoon, won't it? I feel I can *really* enjoy myself now."

She chatted on gaily as they climbed up through the wood at the Grange garden, and hardly left off chatter-

ing and laughing as preparations and adjustments were made for their drive, and she was packed into the front seat beside the owner of the car. It was Norman's suggestion that she should keep company with his friend Blundellovitch on the outward journey and with his friend Pollocksky on the homeward. But he altered this arrangement on the return, and insisted upon sitting behind with her himself. "She's my cousin and not yours," was his argument, "and I find I've got a lot to say to her."

For a good many months afterwards Pamela looked back upon that expedition as the last entirely happy time she had had. It seemed as if the troubles that had been darkening her home life increasingly of late had all been swept away, for she had no doubt then that her father and her uncle would immediately compose their differences, and the close intimacy between the two families would go on as before. It had not occurred to her that the Grange would be completely unoccupied. Her uncle and aunt had often been away, for many weeks together, and she had sometimes been with them, in the South of France or in Scotland, or elsewhere. It would be fun to go to the house in Suffolk; she had not been away from home for a long time, and change was agreeable to her, especially in that company.

So she gave herself up to the enjoyment of the hour, and was sparkling and radiant with happiness. Mr. Blundellovitch, as he was called throughout the afternoon, was a stricken victim of her charms, and Mr. Pollocksky, though unrighteously deprived of his op-

portunities, was not behind him in admiration of her. They had a merry time in the house which they visited, and started homewards so late that it was dark long before they reached Hayslope. During the last half hour she and Norman talked quietly together, her hand in his. There had been misunderstandings between them, as between their parents, but they were done away with now, and they were as close together as they had ever been. It was not until then that she realized that the Grange was to be forsaken in two days' time, which induced a slight touch of melancholy, not unpleasing under the circumstances, which included a full moon, and a delicious astringent hint of autumn in the warm night air. Norman wasn't sure that even the partridges would make it worth while to exchange Hayslope for Eylsham; but Pamela said wisely that it would be better for their two families not be be so close to one another for a time. "When you're as old as Dad and Uncle Bill," she said, "it's more difficult to make up a quarrel. They'll like each other much better if they don't see so much of one another for a time."

"Yes," said Norman, "I think that's true. They wouldn't be able to treat it as you and I should. We might have little rows occasionally, but we should always make them up, and when we had we should forget all about them at once. That's one of the advantages of being young. I like being young, don't you? It comes over me sometimes that I am, just as it used to come over me out there, 'I'm in France.' But I'm not in France now, and I shan't be young any longer in half a minute or so."

"I don't know that I quite follow you," said Pamela politely.

"Oh, I follow myself, all the way. Don't you see? Take the governor, for instance. He must have enjoyed himself as we're doing now when he was our age, and sometimes thought how jolly it was to be young. And being old seemed centuries off, or at least so far off that it didn't count. Yet here he is thirty years or so older, and it's what he's doing now that matters to him. It isn't that it's a short time or a long time. It's just that time doesn't seem to count somehow. Look at old Horace, we three Latinists were reading this morning. He was extraordinarily alive, and aware of himself, so to speak. But nearly two thousand years have slipped by since he got tight, or half tight, and played the goat generally. They don't count when you read him, and another few years won't count for us when we look back on to-day. We're here—now. That's all that seems to matter."

"Yes, I think I see it dimly," said Pam. "Anyhow, I'm very glad that we are here now. It's a lovely world, and I think you *must* enjoy it more when you're young."

The next day there was some coming and going between the Hall and the Grange, but the shadow of immediate departure lay over the Grange, and it was impossible not to take it as a departure more significant than it had hitherto appeared. Lady Eldridge might come down again for a day or two to finish her packings away for the winter. Norman said that he would

come down before he went back to Cambridge. But the prospect of autumn and winter passing over the house emptied of its usual life could not be ignored, and as yet there were no signs of the complete reconciliation that Norman had announced. All the family from the Hall were at the Grange during the afternoon except Colonel Eldridge. Pamela had thought he would come with them and was disappointed because he didn't. Her mother and her aunt talked together, but, it seemed to Pamela, not in quite the same way as before.

She had one more talk with Norman alone. They went down together to Barton's Close, not with any conscious intention of visiting the scene of so much disturbance, but probably led to it by some such impulse. The wide, wood-enclosed meadow lay quiet and deserted. The soil that had been dug up for the plantings over a considerable area had been grassed over again, with the sods cut from it, but the design of the garden, as far as it had gone, was plain to be seen. It would never be made now. That thought struck them both at the same time, for they had taken a modified interest in the project, and their imaginations had played about the garden that was to have been made here. It was almost as if it had been, and was now destroyed.

"It's a pity," Norman said. "However, it doesn't really matter, if we can get rid of the bothers that came of it."

For the first time, the thought came to Pamela that her father had been unreasonable. But she put it away from her. "It wasn't this that they really quarrelled about," she said, "though it began it. Norman, do

you think that it *is* all over? I don't feel quite so sure as I did yesterday."

Norman didn't feel quite so sure either. He had had a talk with his mother, and though she had agreed that there was nothing left now of the original grounds of the quarrel, she had not treated it as if they were back on the old terms yet. It had almost seemed to him that she didn't wish that particularly. She had been very quiet about it, but what had struck him most was that she was obviously glad that they were going away. He knew that she loved the home that she had made for herself at the Grange. She had not even seen the Suffolk house, which had not at first been talked of as if it were to provide them with more than a place for the entertainment of their shooting-parties. Some of those might very well have been for men only, and she might have preferred to come to the Grange at intervals instead of arranging for everything away from it, as she was doing now, hurriedly but completely.

But he didn't want Pam to think that they were leaving Hayslope because of the quarrel. Better debit something to his father rather than that!

"Well, all this sudden pushing off is rather like the governor, you know," he said. "He's kept himself young in that way. He gets a sudden idea into his head, and that's the great thing for the moment. I'm rather like that myself. Perhaps Uncle Edmund thinks it all rather funny; but—you'll see—when he's been up to Eylsham and shot a few birds and drunk a few glasses of good old tawny, they'll be as thick as thieves together again."

"Do you think Uncle William will ask him to shoot with him?"

"Why, of course he will." But as he said it Norman had some doubts of his own. Uncle Edmund was a difficult person. The disordered ground in front of them seemed to cry that aloud. His father was about fed up with it. If Uncle Edmund didn't respond graciously to this last attempt to satisfy his demands there might be no reconciliation at all. There was nothing more left to be done, and he would just have to be left alone till he came round of himself. If Norman read his mother aright, she was already preparing for that to be a long process.

Moreover, he had asked if Pam couldn't be included in the first party, which his father had already made up. The guns were to be three of his father's friends, and Norman and Blundell and Pollock, who were proposing to pursue their course of reading in whatever intervals of leisure might be left to them at Eylsham. Only one man was bringing his wife. There would be plenty of room for Pam. But his mother had said that his father didn't want anybody from the Hall until they knew where they stood. There would be plenty of time later.

So there was something that couldn't be said to her, and yet she must know that in ordinary times she would have been asked. Oh, it was all becoming difficult and beastly again. Why on earth couldn't Uncle Edmund do the proper generous thing for once and put an end to it all for good? Yesterday they had been as happy as larks because they had thought their elders had

settled their quarrel. Perhaps they had, but it wasn't certain yet, and in the meantime here was poor little Pam getting sad about it again. And no wonder, with this beastly half-made and unmade garden in front of her eyes.

"Oh, why did we come down here?" he said, turning away in impatience. "I hate the very sight of the place. Let's go back and find the others."

They went back, and were cousinly to one another, but careful again now not to touch upon the awkward subject. The cord that had bound them together so closely the evening before was loosened.

The next day the Grange was left empty, and the gardeners went down to Barton's Close with a horse-roller, and flattened down the places where the ground had been disturbed.

CHAPTER XXV

MISS BALDWIN LOOKS ON

To Miss Baldwin, watching the progress of that story in real life which she found even more absorbing than her favourite fiction, it seemed that complicating influences were coming into play, as summer passed into autumn and autumn into winter. The story was made the more interesting, but that happy ending which she rigidly exacted from all stories that should earn her approbation, became increasingly obscured to her vision. In a written story, you know—if you dealt with fiction of the sort that you could trust—that the happy ending would come, and previous troubles to be passed through only threw it into greater relief when it did come. But in a story of real life you could not be so sure. In real life things sometimes went wrong and remained wrong, which was one reason for turning for relief to the right sort of fiction.

Fred Comfrey, upon whose suit, it will be remembered, Miss Baldwin was inclined to look with favour, went away, rather suddenly. Watching Pamela with sharp but sympathetic eyes, she questioned whether "something" hadn't happened. There was some talk about Fred at breakfast and luncheon, which were Miss Baldwin's opportunities for getting into touch with family views. He was taking up a career in which he had already attained some success; and a still

greater measure of success was expected of him now that he was ready to throw himself into it again. Colonel Eldridge seemed to believe in him, and to like him. Miss Baldwin could not interpret anything he said as a sign that he had any suspicion of Fred's hopes of winning Pamela. His references to the young man were hardly to be labelled as patronizing, but there was always a sense of difference in them; or so it seemed to Miss Baldwin, who was alive to such shades. She did not herself attach much social value to the Comfreys. The Vicar was the Vicar, ex-officio on an equality with her employers, and so treated by them, but he was obviously of a different clay from the Vicar of Blagrove, for instance, who with his family were of the intimates among the country neighbours. Mrs. Comfrey seemed hardly to consider herself, and certainly Miss Baldwin didn't consider her, on an equality with Mrs. Eldridge. If Fred were to be viewed only in the light of his origin, it would not be surprising that the idea of his aspiring to Pamela had not yet so much as entered the head of Pamela's father.

But love takes small heed of such reckonings; otherwise, what would have become of half the stories that Miss Baldwin so much enjoyed? The strong devoted young man who was to fight his arduous way to an eminence which he might fitly invite the lady of his choice to share with him, would be greatly encouraged in his ascent if that lady's sympathies were with him. And they might be; for she would see in him from the beginning something of what he had it in him to become.

Were Pamela's sympathies with Fred in his coming

endeavours? Certainly they were. She agreed with everything that was said about the merit shown by a man with no initial advantages in making his way in the world by his own efforts and character. But there was no least little sign of a personal interest in the result. If there had been, Miss Baldwin could hardly have missed it. There seemed to be, instead, a tendency to close the subject, whenever it was opened, with some general or even platitudinous observation which, with other signs, persuaded Miss Baldwin that Pamela had acquired some distaste for Fred Comfrey. But she had been markedly friendly to him right up till the time he went away; so what could the reason be but that he had "said something to her?"

Out of her expert knowledge of such subjects, Miss Baldwin had no difficulty in conjecturing what that "something" had been, or in interpreting the slight indications afforded by Pamela as proof of what she had always supposed. Pamela had given Fred her friendship, but never in the smallest degree her love, and the premature declaration of his love for her had come as an unpleasant shock to her.

The effect of these conclusions upon Miss Baldwin herself was that from the moment she formed them her sympathies began to depart from Fred. This is easily explicable. Up until now he had been selected by her as the suitor towards whose success the story was directing itself. One allowed oneself those castings forward in the early stages of a story. But, when indications began to be dropped that a particular suitor was not intended for the prize, one put oneself upon the

side of whoever else seemed likely to win it, thus preparing for full participation in the author's ultimate design. She had piled upon Fred virtues that were not too apparent as long as there seemed reasonable hope of his success; but now that Pamela, if she read her aright, had rejected the idea of him and his virtues, they seemed much less to her. He was not, unless Pamela chose to reckon him so, in any way to be considered her equal. He might, indeed, if the story should so run, quite adequately play some sort of villain's part, such as— But it was too early to cast forward in that direction. The story was still progressing in its main lines, with another suitor to be observed, and an evident awareness on the part of all the characters who came within her view of what was going on.

She had her opportunity with the rest of taking occasion to watch the trend of events, for Lady Crowborough, coming over to Hayslope on a day of early September to announce herself as the giver of an elaborate picnic entertainment, had graciously included Miss Baldwin, who happened to come within range of her vision, in the general invitation. Miss Baldwin hardly supposed that she would enjoy herself, when she accepted it; but she did, and not only because of the opportunities it gave her for observation. The whole affair was like a scene in a story—a story of high life —and her description of it, in letters to relatives were full, and within due limits enthusiastic.

The numerous guests, drawn from the houses large and small within a fairly wide radius, assembled at the

Castle at about eleven o'clock of a golden morning. They came mostly in cars of their own, but some driving, some riding bicycles, and a few on horseback. The horses seemed to give the expedition something of the flavour of a past time, though there were hardly enough of them to deserve the style of cavalcade, such as must often have set out from Pershore Castle in days not long gone by. Pamela rode on a horse provided for her from the Pershore stables, and so did young Lord Horsham. So did a niece of Lady Crowborough's staying in the house, who was the life and soul of the party, and seemed to be responsible for many of the arrangements. She had taken particular notice of Miss Baldwin herself, and arranged for her to drive in a carriage with an extremely nice clergyman and his wife and invalid daughter, who were spending their holidays at a farmhouse near.

There were refreshments provided at the Castle before the start was made. Miss Baldwin described the Castle, as it had presented itself to her—one of the stately homes of England, of which she had been promised a more extended exploration at a future date. The noble owners had also struck her favourably, as true representatives of the aristocracy of our favoured land —stately, too, especially the Countess, but of the most courteous manner, and without a touch of condescension.

The scene of the picnic was a tract of primeval forest some ten miles away. There were ancient gnarled trees of immense girth, with little secret lawns, and stretches of deep bracken; a purling stream, and an

outcrop of rugged rocks, where the picnic feast was held. After having feasted and strolled, the party returned to the Castle, and then broke up, at a comparatively early hour. A simple entertainment, but quite delightful experience, with most of the best-known people in that part of the County attending and all expressing themselves as having obtained the acme of enjoyment from it.

Miss Baldwin's letter did not disclose what seemed to her to have been the inspiration and intention of this highly appreciated entertainment. It was so much a matter of her own discovery that she hardly dared to lay stress on it, even in her own imaginings. And yet she thought she could not be mistaken. There was a round dozen of young girls there, some of them of more obvious social importance than Pamela; but the honours were hers. She was not mistaken there, for the nice clergyman's wife asked her who Pamela was, and seemed surprised to hear that there was no title attached to her, as there was to some of the others. And the nice clergyman's invalid daughter asked her pointblank whether Pamela was engaged to young Lord Horsham. Both Lord and Lady Crowborough appeared to treat her as if she were; but, as Miss Baldwin knew that she was not, this could only mean that they wanted her to be. Nor was it too much to suppose that, by treating her almost as the most honoured guest, they were willing that all these country neighbours whom they had gathered together should know that they wanted her to be.

And yet nothing came of it. The few days, exciting

to Miss Baldwin because of what she was expecting, which followed the picnic brought no announcement. Lord Horsham came over to the Hall the very next day, but nothing came of that, as might so confidently have been expected. He came over several times more before he went back to Oxford in October. He was the admitted friend of the family; there was no young person who was there more often, and no young man of those who came to the house who could be considered in the light of a rival, now that Fred Comfrey was off the scene. It seemed to Miss Baldwin that there was an air of expectation abroad; that both Colonel and Mrs. Eldridge were waiting for something. And the conviction grew upon her that there was a hitch somewhere.

Where was it? There was no doubt about the young man's admiration for Pamela. He was the best of friends with Judith, and very nice to the children, as was natural, but it was Pamela who drew him. Her attitude towards him was frank and kind. Oh, she did like him, and was bright and gay when he was there, though not always so at other times. Could it be that she was, after all, casting thoughts back to that other? By this time Miss Baldwin was inclined to resent such an idea. Fred had taken his place in her scheme as the rejected suitor, and it now seemed to her that Pamela had never treated Fred with the same kind of friendliness as she treated Horsham. Couldn't she make up her mind about him? Or was there something else going on that delayed the wished-for climax?

It came gradually to Miss Baldwin, as the months

passed by, that there was a good deal going on at Hayslope of which she had not the key.

Life was duller there, and sadder, than she had known it at any time during the two years she had been there, even during the last months of the war, when Colonel Eldridge had been mostly away, and the shadow of Hugo's death still lay over them. But during that first winter, when things were beginning to settle down, there had been a good deal going on that had interested Miss Baldwin in her first experience of the life of a country house. Very little of it went on now.

What had become of all the visiting that seemed to play such a large part in the lives of such people as the Eldridge's? Colonel and Mrs. Eldridge never slept away from Hayslope during that autumn and early winter. Pamela went away twice, and Judith once. Pamela had a girl friend to stay with her for a week or so, and an aunt of Mrs. Eldridge's, who had been wont to spend the month of October at Hayslope for years past, came with her maid, but went back to Brighton, where she lived, after a week. It was then that Miss Baldwin first realized how everything was being cut down, more and more closely. The old lady was reported to have said that she didn't get enough to eat, which was of course ridiculous; what she didn't get was the elaborate provision that had struck Miss Baldwin herself when she had first come to Hayslope Hall. Nor did she get the service, except what her own pampered grumbling maid gave her. Nobody else came to the Hall, where there had been a constant suc-

cession of guests. There were only enough servants now to do the work of the house for the normal family life, which was also being reduced all the time, something here always being cut off or something there. The drawing-room was shut up, the billiard-room was never used. Mrs. Eldridge gave up her room and took to the morning-room, which all the family inhabited. More wood than coal was to be burnt in the schoolroom, and everywhere else. The outdoor staff was cut down to one man and a boy for the garden, and Timbs for stable and garage; but the cars were little used now. The light supper which had taken the place of dinner during the summer was continued, except for the week during which the old woman from Brighton was there.

There was never any discussion of these and other economies, at least before Miss Baldwin, and there was no grumbling at them. Colonel Eldridge was far more silent than she had ever known him, and she thought he was ageing, and seemed now, when she saw him sometimes from the schoolroom window walking alone, always to have his eyes on the ground, and to stoop slightly, who had been so upright and active. Mrs. Eldridge was just the same, always unruffled, always well-dressed, though seldom in the beautiful clothes Miss Baldwin had been wont to admire. Pamela and Judith had taken to doing things that had been done before by servants, mostly out of doors. They looked after the poultry entirely, making a pastime of it to all appearance. And they had taken to making many of their own clothes; Mrs. Eldridge's maid, who had

also looked after them, was much occupied in housework. No word ever fell from either of them to show that they were affected by the change in their circumstances, which by now had come to be a complete change from the way of life lived at Hayslope during that first winter after the war. Pamela was not nearly so bright as she had been; there was *something* the matter with her, though it was not, apparently, discontent with home conditions. Judith was much the same as she had always been, sometimes silent, sometimes uproarious; half a child, half a woman; but Judith had not known the life that Pamela had known, after she was grown-up. Judith's life was altered chiefly by her emancipation from the schoolroom. Her home and what went on in it was enough for her, as it was for the children.

The outstanding difference at Hayslope, greater even than the changes at the Hall, which, after all, did not affect the core of family life, was the Grange unoccupied. There it stood, a big, rich house, from which had radiated sociability and close intimacy, with all its rooms shut up, its chimneys cold, its windows shuttered. There were a man and his wife to caretake, and men still at work outside—more than there were now at the Hall, though their only task was to keep things just alive for future occupancy. It made a blank, even to Miss Baldwin and the children, who sometimes went through the gardens in their walks, and lamented its desolation, as remarkable by contrast as if it had been falling into complete disuse. Presently there seemed to grow up about its forsaken state something signifi-

cant of a change more unhappy than was shown by a house from which life had only been removed for a time. What did it stand for in the story that Miss Baldwin was tracing out for herself from all the happenings around her?

Neither Lord Eldridge nor Lady Eldridge, nor Norman, had come back since they had left Hayslope at the end of August. Nobody from the Hall had visited them, either in London or at the other house they had taken in the country.

Miss Baldwin was not in the way of picking up rumours at Hayslope. She was not in close enough contact with the family in which she lived to get much from them, and she was in no closer contact with servants or with people outside. But she could not help knowing that there had been something of a split; and indeed that was now taken for granted. Alice and Isabelle knew it. "Father and Uncle William aren't very good friends now. I think Uncle William takes too much on himself now he is a Lord, and father doesn't quite like it. But they'll be friends again when Uncle William comes back to Hayslope." Isabelle had said that, as they were going through the Grange garden. Some of it she had been told, some of it she had probably made up for herself, for Alice had contradicted her. "I don't think it's anything to do with his being a lord. Auntie Eleanor is a Lady, and she's just the same; and so is Norman."

But were they just the same? It looked as if the estrangement had affected both families by this time, though on the surface they maintained relations. Col-

onel Eldridge corresponded with his brother, for he sometimes mentioned, in Miss Baldwin's presence, that he had heard from him. Pamela, if no one else, had been asked to stay at Eylsham. Why hadn't she gone? That had never been disclosed. Norman wrote to her sometimes, from Cambridge, and she to him.

What was the quarrel about? Money, thought Miss Baldwin, having come to this conclusion partly because in fiction it was generally money that brothers who had reached middle age quarrelled about, if they quarrelled at all, partly because of the now patent contrast between the wealth that exuded from Lord Eldridge and the lack of it that was increasingly in evidence at the Hall. She could find no simple explanation of why this state of things should have brought about a quarrel, but its effects were now remarkable enough. The younger brother was a rich man, and a lord, the elder, in spite of his large house and his estates, was seen to be a poor one. Surely the younger ought to have come to the assistance of the elder before this! He was not only not doing that; he was holding off from him. Dark work, somewhere!

Early in December Fred Comfrey paid a visit to Hayslope, and Miss Baldwin's interest returned to Pamela and her story, which had fallen into the second place of late, because of what was happening otherwise. It seemed to her that Pamela's attitude towards him was entirely different from what it had been. She was friendly, but seemed on the alert not to be left alone with him. His dejection was plain to be seen. Colonel Eldridge seemed glad to see him; otherwise he

would probably not have been asked to the house more than once, during the two days of his visit. He came on Saturday morning and stayed to lunch; and he came again to lunch on Sunday and stayed most of the afternoon. But Pamela had bicycled over after church to a house a few miles off, and did not return until he had gone.

At supper on Sunday evening the veil was lifted for a moment from what had been puzzling Miss Baldwin; but what was revealed only puzzled her more.

Colonel Eldridge talked about Fred, and said: "He has been doing business with William—seen quite a lot of him."

Pamela looked up surprised. "He never told me that," she said.

That was all. The veil was dropped again immediately. Lord Eldridge was mentioned sometimes before Miss Baldwin, perhaps to keep up appearances; but she was not to hear anything about him that mattered. All that she gathered from this was that Colonel Eldridge saw nothing to object to in a business connection between Lord Eldridge and Fred Comfrey, and that Pamela was surprised, and apparently displeased at it. Or perhaps her displeasure was only at Fred's not having told her. But she hadn't given him much opportunity of telling her anything. It was all very difficult; but what seemed to be plain was that Fred Comfrey could now be ruled out as a suitor, though he might not yet consider himself so.

This was quite what Miss Baldwin wished by this time, and her satisfaction was increased when Lord

Horsham soon afterwards reappeared on the scene. He was received in a very different way. It really seemed at last as if something were going to happen. Miss Baldwin had come to hold a high opinion of Lord Horsham, as a young man of sober, steady habits who would make an excellent husband even for so fine a flower of girlhood as Pamela, and this altogether apart from the rich gilding of his title and inheritance. But he had not, previously, presented himself to her as one whose coming might be expected to enliven a whole household. That, however, was the effect of his frequent visits during the early part of his Christmas vacation. And what could Colonel and Mrs. Eldridge's lively welcome of him mean but that they also thought something might be about to happen? What could Pamela's lighter spirits mean but that she was getting ready for something to happen? Judith and the children might not yet have had their eyes opened to the possibilities of the happening, but they all three made much of Lord Horsham. That might partly be accounted for by the rarity of such visits as his in these days; but on his side there seemed to be a conscious desire to stand well with them, and a success in the endeavour which was agreeable to watch. If Pamela did marry him, her family might be expected to share some of the tangible fruits of the alliance. They could hardly be said to have gone down in the world—that dreadful phrase which sometimes suggested itself to Miss Baldwin—if the eldest son of an Earl, who lived in an ancient Castle, took his bride from their house.

Miss Baldwin went home for three weeks' holiday at Christmas, hoping that on her return a new chapter in the romance would be ready for her perusal. It had reached the point at which developments of some sort could not long be delayed.

CHAPTER XXVI

BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Christmas had always been a great family occasion at Hayslope. For years before the William Eldridges had come to live at the Grange they had spent their Christmases at the Hall, and there had sometimes been other relations there. This year an indeterminate spinster cousin of Mrs. Eldridge's was coming, but no other guests. Lord Eldridge would be entertaining a party at Eylsham Hall, duly announced in the press.

It was this announcement that seemed to Pamela to complete and establish the breach between the two families. "Why is it?" she asked her mother. "I thought that father and Uncle William were more or less friends again now. They write to each other. Uncle William sent his love to us in a letter he wrote the other day."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Eldridge, with a sigh. "But there it begins and ends. Father would have been quite willing to make it up any time during the last few months; but Uncle William doesn't seem to want to. He's got quite away from us, you see. He's in the big world, and we're not. I suppose he doesn't think about us any more."

"But Auntie Eleanor! She writes to you, mother."

"Oh, yes," she said again. "*We*'ve never quarrelled."

"But won't it *ever* end, mother? Just look at the difference—what happy Christmases we used to spend all together! And now there's no idea of our being together at all. Didn't you ask them to come here for Christmas?"

"Well, I didn't tell father, but I wrote to Auntie Eleanor and asked her if they would come if we did ask them. I thought it might bring us all together again. But of course it would have been worse if we had asked them and they had refused. She wrote very nicely, as she always does; but William had already made up his party, or some of it. I dare say what happened was that he found he could get somebody that he particularly wanted then, and asked the rest to meet him—or her, or them. I don't know. When people once begin to chase other people, for their names or their positions or whatever it is that attracts them, it—well, it becomes a habit. Other sociabilities have to give way to it."

This was rather painful to Pamela. "But Auntie Eleanor isn't like that, mother dear."

It was half a question. "No," said Mrs. Eldridge, quite decisively. "She and I have often talked that over. At least, we used to, before we settled it between us, for good and all. It simply isn't worth while to make friends with anybody for any other reason than because you like them for themselves, and not for what they've got. Now you're grown up, darling, I don't mind telling you that I was rather inclined at one time —oh, years and years ago—to want to get myself in everywhere. It's easy enough, if you have a certain position to begin with, and enough money. And I was

quite good-looking, when I was first married, and—"

"You are now, mother darling," said Pamela, with a laugh: "but do go on."

"I don't say that there's not some fun to be got out of it," Mrs. Eldridge continued. "Of course I don't mean just the vulgar sort of climbing; but it's amusing to feel that you *belong* to everything, and people want you, instead of your wanting them. Still, it's never worth while in the long run. Eleanor saw that quite clearly, from the beginning, and she made me see it. It's one of the things that I have to thank her for."

"Oh, mother, it's dreadful that you have to be apart now. Don't you feel it very much?"

"Of course I do. But not so much as I should have done a few years ago. You're grown up now, you see. Besides, I've got used to the quiet life. I don't really want anything else now, as long as one can live without too much anxiety. I only discovered that a short time ago. Eleanor was always preaching it to me; but now she's getting farther away from it herself, poor dear. I'm sorry for her."

Pamela's direct mind was apt to be a little puzzled by her mother. It was not always easy to recognize the source of her speeches, or whether she was serious or only amusing herself. "Do you mean that you're really sorry for her?" she asked. "I suppose she needn't get away from the sort of life she likes, if she doesn't want to."

"She can't help herself. She loves William. I love father, and I want what he wants. It's the same with her. But what he wants happens to be more satisfy-

ing than what William wants. It's only rather tiresome that just as I have discovered that for myself it's beginning to be difficult to have anything at all that one wants. I've been wanting to tell you something for some time, Pam darling, but I've put it off because I went on hoping that it might not be necessary. Don't tell the others yet, but I'm afraid it has to come. We can't afford to go on living here."

Pamela looked down. "Poor old Daddy!" she said.

"Yes, it's for him I feel it more than for ourselves. It seems to be impossible for a country gentleman to live in his own house nowadays, unless he has an income apart from it. Daddy never had much that wasn't tied up, and what he did have is all gone now. I don't think we can get expenses down any farther here; it is just coming to be a great anxiety. It was I who said I thought we ought to go. He could hardly have brought himself to propose it before it became absolutely impossible, as it isn't quite, yet."

"Do you mean he is going to sell Hayslope, mummy?"

"No, darling, he couldn't do that; he only has a life interest. He'll try to let the house and the shooting. It's just that we can't afford to keep up a house of this size, for ourselves to live in. We should be quite well off in a smaller house, and with the rent for this coming in, if it can be let."

"Where should we go, mother?"

"That's the difficulty. Father wants to be here, to look after the property. If the Grange hadn't been

enlarged to such an extent, we could have gone there; but there's no good thinking of that. It would cost as much to live there now as to live here. We have thought of Town Farm. It was a Manor house at one time, but it would take a lot of money to put it back now, and make it nice to live in. I'm afraid it's either that, or going quite away. But there's no need to hurry anything. We shan't go away just yet. Don't tell Judith, or the children yet."

"No, mother, of course not. Don't you think I could go out and do something? So many girls do now. I'm sure I could make my own living if I tried."

"There's no necessity, darling. And I think father would hate that more than anything. I know he would like you to stay at home until you marry."

Was this an invitation to her to unburden herself? Her mother had never mentioned marriage to her before. If it was, she did not take it up. "There are lots of things I can do at home," she said. "And Judith, too. You know we'll do all we can, mother dear."

"Oh, yes, darling. I think that if we can find a nice house somewhere in the country, much smaller than this, but big enough for us to be happy in, it will lift a good deal of the burden. Poor Daddy is getting more and more depressed about everything, though he is trying to keep it from us all the time. It's very hard that it should be like this now for men who have done what he has. It all comes from the horrible war; and yet there are some people who have done nothing but thrive on it."

There was no need to dot the i's of that speech. Pamela didn't want to talk about her uncle, even to her mother. There was no satisfaction to be gained from blaming him, but she did blame him now in her heart, and she thought that her mother did too. Would he stand by and see them leave their home without doing anything? Of course he could do something, if he wanted to. But he didn't seem to care now. Did her aunt care? She was sure that she did, but she had apparently resigned herself to the new unhappy state of things between them. Did Norman care?

He had written to Pamela from Cambridge, not less frequently than during previous terms, and in much the same way. Some of his letters had made her laugh, but not with the old light-hearted appreciation of his humour. What mattered to her most just now he never mentioned. Once he had represented himself as on the verge of another love affair, with the daughter of a Don of another college, to which he said he was thinking of migrating. But she did not smile at all at that. She was beginning to be impatient of Norman's love affairs, which never lasted more than a few weeks. This one didn't last so long as that apparently, for he did not allude to it again. If he had done so, Pamela would have written him a letter in which she would have said that she didn't want to hear any more about his philanderings, and she was inclined to regret that the opportunity was denied her. Norman never said anything about Christmas, though in previous years his letters had been full of anticipations. He seemed to

be quite content at the prospect of their spending it apart.

Oh, life was unhappy now. But there remained the duty of hiding unhappiness as much as possible. Pamela was a good deal with her father in these days, and she knew that he liked to have her with him, though he never talked to her about his troubles. Well, it was something to be able to remove his mind from them. She was able to do that, though she seemed to be of so little use otherwise.

The usual preparations for Christmas went on, though on a smaller scale than before. The children mustn't know that for their elders all such preparations were something of an extra burden instead of a pleasure. Even Judith refused to be exhilarated by them. "What's the good of holly and mistletoe," she said, "with only old Cousin Annie coming? I think Uncle William's a beast. I never liked him, and now I hate him."

Pamela protested. Judith had been as fond of Uncle William as all the rest of them. "Perhaps I was when I was little," she admitted. "But I haven't liked him at all since he has been Lord Eldridge. Father ought to have been Lord Eldridge, if anybody had to be. But I hate lords, except Jim; and he isn't like a lord."

Pamela laughed. "What is he like then?" she asked.

Judith did not reply to this. "I think you ought to marry him," she said, with her sometimes disconcerting abruptness. "He wants you to, and you couldn't get anybody better. Besides, father and mother would

like it. With four of us, and being rather poor now, of course they would like us to get married."

"How do you know Jim would like me to marry him?" asked Pamela.

"Because he told me so."

This was rather surprising news. Pamela would have liked to ask if he had told Judith of his proposal, but Judith saved her the trouble. "It was quite plain what he wanted," she said, "so I asked him about it. You needn't tell him that I told you so. I like Jim, and I want to see him properly treated. Besides, if you married Jim, I could come and stay with you."

"Well, you could come and stay with me whoever I married; but I don't see why you shouldn't marry yourself, as soon as I do. What did Jim say when you asked him?"

"He said there was nothing he wanted more; but he knew you didn't want it yet. I thought that was rather nice of him. Jim has a very nice sort of modesty. Most young men nowadays think such a lot of themselves."

Pamela laughed at this. "What young men?" she asked.

"Well, Norman for one. I like Norman all right, but he isn't modest, like Jim. And I don't think he's behaving very well now. *He* could come and see us, if he wanted to. I suppose he couldn't very well come for Christmas, and leave all the lords and ladies they are going to have to stay with them; but he might come some time. He left Cambridge long ago."

"Only just over a week ago," said Pam. But she

thought herself that Norman might have come. He was staying with some friends in Ireland now. There were several young girls in the family, or in the party. Perhaps he was falling in love with one of them. As he had been there for some days, and was going to stay for another week, there would almost be time to fall in love with two, successively. Pamela was rather pleased with that idea, and thought she would write and suggest it to him. She was always on the lookout for little opportunities of scoring off Norman now.

But Norman redeemed his character altogether for the time being by writing to propose himself for Christmas at the Hall. Preparations went on with more gaiety then. With Norman there, this Christmas wouldn't be so different from others, after all.

In the week before Christmas, Colonel Eldridge went up to London, for the first time for many months, and while he was there telegraphed home that General and Mrs. Wilton were coming down with him for the week-end. This, too, was like old times. It was some time since the house had been managed in such a way as to involve no special preparation for guests of this kind, but these were old friends who had been at Hayslope before, and it was a pleasure to get ready for them, though it was somewhat of a surprise that they should be asked. "But I think I know why," Mrs. Eldridge said to Pam, "and I don't know whether to be glad or sorry. General Wilton sold his place in Ireland not long ago, and they only have a London house now. Perhaps he is thinking of taking this."

So it proved. Colonel Eldridge told Pamela about it

himself, after they had gone. "They are going to the South of France after Christmas," he said, "and don't want to make any plans till they come back in the spring. But I think he'll take it. I'd rather have him here than anybody, if I've got to let the place. Shall you mind very much, do you think, Pam?"

"Dear old Daddy," said Pam, slipping her hand under his arm—they were walking together—"I shall only mind because it's so beastly for you. But it will be a weight off you, won't it, not to have to keep it all up?"

"Yes. I shan't mind as much as I thought I should, because of that. If you've got something that you can't keep going, it hardly seems to belong to you. I shall be better away from Hayslope now, and we'll find something somewhere that we shall like. We shan't have to clear out for some months, anyhow. We'll enjoy it as much as we can in the meantime."

"Does Uncle William know you are going to let the house?" she asked.

"No," he said shortly, but added after a time: "It's no good thinking of that, you know. We've got to stand on our own feet."

"Oh, yes, of course," she said, but thought all the time that Uncle William might stop the letting of the house, if he were so minded. And surely, he must be so minded! He didn't seem to care much about Hayslope himself now, leaving his own house there empty for all these months; but he couldn't want to see them leave it too. She wondered what Norman would say when he heard of it.

CHAPTER XXVII

TWO YOUNG MEN

Colonel Eldridge was sitting in his room over the fire, which was unusual with him in the middle of the morning. But the weather was atrocious, and he had the beginnings of a cold on him, which disinclined him for activity either physical or mental. The door opened, and Fred Comfrey was announced. He was a little surprised to see him, for though he had frequented the Hall when at Hayslope he had not come straight to him; and this was his first appearance in the Christmas holidays. But his visit was not unwelcome. Colonel Eldridge was not used to sitting idle, and a little chat would be agreeable to him.

"Well, and how's the world using you?" he asked. "I hope you've been making a success of it."

It seemed that Fred had been making a considerable success of it. He had been given a partnership, which he had not expected for a year at least, and his firm had just as much business as they could tackle. "My job is to organize ourselves for taking on more still," he said, "and it's taking me all my time. I hardly thought I should be able to get down here for more than just Christmas Day. But I said I must have three or four days off. Fortunately I'm in a position to do what I please now. I couldn't have insisted three months ago."

"Oh, well, it's an advantage to be your own master. Very few of us are. There's generally something to prevent us doing what we like. I hope it means a good income to you. It seems to me you must be in business of some sort nowadays to make enough to live on."

Fred enlarged upon what it meant to him in the way of income—a quite substantial one in the present, and the certainty of a big one in the future. He went into more detail than seemed necessary, and at considerable length. Colonel Eldridge said: "Well, I like to hear of a young man making good. You seem to be well up on the ladder already, and you're what?—twenty-eight? You were just a year older than Hugo, weren't you? You'll have to think of getting married and settling down soon."

Fred's colour deepened, and he gave a little catch of the breath, but said in a fairly steady voice: "That's what I've come to see you about. I want your permission to ask Pamela."

Colonel Eldridge sat absolutely still, and his face showed nothing. But his voice did, when he said, after a pause: "That's an entirely new idea to me. Have you any reason to suppose that Pamela would—would be prepared for such a declaration?"

The ice was broken, and Fred spoke more easily, but with his eyes fixed on the fire. "I've never tried to make love to her," he said. "I didn't think I had a right to. I've hoped that I should be in a position to come to you like this some day, but I didn't think the time would come so soon. I should have to make my own way with her, and I shouldn't expect to do it at

once. But I thought I ought to satisfy you first that I shall be in a position to give her what you would have a right to expect for her."

Colonel Eldridge's eyes had rested on him during the progress of this speech. He saw before him a young man with a face of some power, but little or no refinement; with a strong-growing crest of thick dark hair; with a sturdy frame in clothes that contrasted somewhat with his own old but well-cut suit of tweeds, neatly-laced thick-soled boots, and neatly-adjusted collar and tie. The hands that lay on his knee, or grasped the arm of his chair, were broad and short-fingered, and their nails were not quite clean.

"You don't think, then, that what I've a right to expect for my daughter goes beyond an income large enough to support her?"

Fred stirred uncomfortably. He must have felt the latent hostility. But his voice did not change. "I don't think that," he said. "I only meant that you'd have a right to expect that first of all. I suppose I couldn't expect you—never have expected you—to welcome the idea, exactly. I didn't begin life with the same advantages as you might expect from anyone who wanted to marry your daughter; but I've made good already, as you've said, and if I may say so without boasting, I'm going farther than most men. I'm determined to; and if I could look forward to—I mean I should have an added incentive, and I don't think there's much I couldn't do in the world. In ten years' time, or less, I don't think you'd have reason to be ashamed of me, as a son-in-law."

"Oh, ashamed! There's no need to talk like that. And one can't take up the position that fathers used to take up over their daughters' marriages. I don't know that you're not right, and the only thing one is entitled to stipulate for nowadays is an assured and sufficient income. Even that seems to have been considered unreasonable in lots of the marriages one has seen take place during the war."

"Yes, I know. But I've waited until I could assure you of a sufficient income, and I've come to you first, as I suppose I shouldn't have done if I hadn't recognized that I was aiming higher than what might be considered my deserts."

"Well, what is it that you want of me exactly? I've no reason to be offended at your coming to me, you know. I've known you for most of your life, and you've been welcomed into my family. I treated you as a friend, myself, only the other day."

"Oh, that was nothing," said Fred. "I was only too glad to be able to be of use to you. I should have been anyhow."

Colonel Eldridge winced a little. "I'll say quite plainly," he said, in a slightly harder voice, "that, from my own point of view, I should be disappointed if my daughter didn't make what would be called a better marriage; but I say it without meaning any offence to you. If she chose to accept you, I shouldn't—I shouldn't refuse my permission, though I think—yes, I think I should stipulate for a certain time to elapse. Will that satisfy you?"

Perhaps it was rather more than Fred had expected,

though it was not precisely encouraging. Colonel Eldridge seemed a good deal farther from him than on the last occasion he had talked to him in this room. "I want my chance with her," he said.

"Well, what do you mean by that? You mustn't go to her, you know, saying that I'm in favour of your —your suit, or whatever you like to call it. How far have you got with her? I say again that this is a complete surprise to me, and I shouldn't have thought that she could have given you any encouragement to go upon."

"I don't know that she has. One has one's own private hopes. We have been friends; I think I can say as much as that. I was a friend of Hugo's; she's been a sort of inspiration to me all my life. Especially lately, it has made a different man of me to think of her. I've been a rough sort of fellow—had to be, in some ways, in the fight I've had to put up. I'm not good enough for her; of course I'm not. But who is?"

Colonel Eldridge's face had grown a little softer. "You talk of her in the right sort of way," he said. "Well, I must leave it to her. If she says yes, I shan't say no."

"Thank you," said Fred gratefully. "I'm glad I came to you first of all. It seemed the right thing to do, though it wasn't very easy."

He laughed awkwardly, and, also rather awkwardly, got himself out of the room. When he had left it Colonel Eldridge walked up and down, as his habit was when he was disturbed in his mind. He was very dis-

turbed now, as the frown on his face and his impatient actions testified. Presently he made as if to go out, but turned again irresolutely, and then rang the bell. He asked the maid who answered it whether Mr. Comfrey was still in the house. Yes, he was in the schoolroom, with the young ladies. His reception of that piece of news probably gave the maid material for talk afterwards, though he was not aware of having shown any feeling. Then he went to the morning-room to find his wife.

She was alone there, and he told her of what had happened. She laughed, unconcernedly. "With a pushing young man of that sort," she said, "I thought it would come to a proposal sooner or later. But I didn't think he would be so foolish as to go to you first."

He didn't understand this. "Why foolish?" he asked, with some impatience. "Surely you haven't seen this coming and done nothing to stop it?"

"What was there to stop? We couldn't not have him in the house because he was likely to fall in love with Pamela. Now we needn't have him more than we want to."

"What do you mean? I said I shouldn't refuse, if Pamela wanted him. He wouldn't be my choice, or yours; but if she . . . ."

"If Pamela wanted him! My dear! Wait till he's gone—I shan't ask him to stay to lunch—and ask Pamela if she wants him."

Pamela came into the room at that moment. Colonel Eldridge bent his brows upon her. He couldn't quite

get it out of his head that she must have given encouragement.

"Where is Fred?" asked Mrs. Eldridge.

"In the schoolroom," said Pamela, and went to the bookcase, which she opened.

"He has just been with father," said Mrs. Eldridge; but Colonel Eldridge stopped her. "I don't think that anything ought to be said," he began.

Mrs. Eldridge laughed. "You didn't promise to say nothing, I suppose," she said.

"No; but—"

"He came to father, Pam, to ask if he had any objection to his marrying you, supposing *you* had no objection."

Pamela blushed deeply, but after a glance at her father said calmly: "I hope you told him that you had, Daddy."

Colonel Eldridge, standing in front of the fire, straightened himself, and smiled. "I told him it wasn't the sort of marriage I expected for you," he said, "but it was for you to decide and not me. I say, I didn't mean to discuss it like this, ten minutes afterwards, with him actually in the house."

"Perhaps we had better wait until he has gone," said Mrs. Eldridge. "Were you going back to the schoolroom, Pam?"

"Well, I wasn't," said Pam; "but I can, if you like."

"There!" said Mrs. Eldridge. Now I think you can go back to your room, dear, and wait a little, without too much anxiety."

Later on there was another short confabulation, the result of which was that Colonel Eldridge wrote a note to Fred to say that he had talked to his daughter, who had told him that it was quite impossible that she should ever come to look upon him in the way he desired. They would be pleased to see him again, on the terms on which he had come to the Hall before, but it would perhaps be as well to let a little time elapse. After which he returned to his easy chair in front of the fire, rather inclined to be puzzled at the suddenness of this new episode, and the celerity with which it had been brought to an end. What Fred thought about it was not made clear, for he did not answer the note, and was not in church on Christmas morning, though he was known to be still at the Vicarage.

All this passed on Tuesday, and on Wednesday, which was Christmas Eve, Norman came.

Norman was in bright spirits, and the whole house responded to them, although Colonel Eldridge, still under the influence of his cold, kept mostly to his room. He was anxious, however, not to give Norman reason to think that he was keeping out of his way, and asked him in for a talk during the afternoon, when he told him how glad he was that he had come, and in such a way as to give the impression that he was thanking him for coming.

"Well, I simply had to, Uncle Edmund," said Norman. "I couldn't have stuck it anywhere else, not even at home. They've got rather a ponderous lot up there this time, and they can do without me all right, though I said I'd go back there the day after Christ-

mas. I think mother would have liked to come too, but of course she's got to play hostess to all the magnates. You wouldn't have thought you could have got so many magnates away from their own turkeys at Christmas time, but the shoot is really awfully good. We had a great day yesterday."

He gave corroborative detail, and they were soon in the midst of a talk on sport, in which Colonel Eldridge took his part almost with enthusiasm. Nothing was said about the estrangement, but what was perfectly clear was that neither Lady Eldridge nor Norman considered it as having altered anything of their affection for the family at the Hall. No change, however, seemed to be indicated in the attitude of Lord Eldridge. Norman did not eschew mention of him, when his name would naturally have come into the conversation, but there was nothing to show that he had been sent on an errand of reconciliation.

Norman hastened to assure Pamela, in answer to inquiries, that his joyous state of mind was not due to his having at last found the right girl in the Irish country house. "No," he said. "There were some bright spirits among them, but not one that I could have gone through life with. I am far more exacting than I was. I told you about Donna Clara, didn't I?"

"I don't think so. At least I don't remember her name for the moment. Could you afford to give me a card index for a Christmas present? I was reading an advertisement the other day, and I think it is just the thing I want, to be able to refer to any of them at a moment's notice."

Norman laughed freely. "That's jolly good, Pam," he said. "Jolly good. If I could only find somebody who could say that sort of thing. Of course she'd have to be as pretty as you too, and you don't find 'em like that in every basket of peaches. Margaret came nearest to you, but—"

"What has become of Margaret? I did think something might happen there, when it had gone on for a fortnight. Or was it only ten days?"

"That's not quite so good, Pam. I saw Margaret last week. We met at a play, and had a word together between the acts. Rather moving, it was. I think we both felt that a chapter in our long-past lives, though closed, would always remain as a tender and delicate memory. In years to come, when she's a duchess on her own, and I'm a minor middle-aged lord, with a chin-beard and a tummy, we shall get rather sentimental with one another. Perhaps we shall fix up a match between my Clarence and her Ermyntrude. But I was going to tell you about Donna Clara. I call her that because her father is a Don of Clare, not because she's Spanish or Portugese, because she isn't. She's a peach; I will say that for her; and dances a treat. But I'm no longer thinking of migrating to Clare College on her account."

"Why not? Is she *quite* brainless? You don't seem to mind them having scarcely any, but I suppose it would be an objection if she hadn't got beyond words of one syllable."

"Don't try too hard, Pam. Something good will slip out if you wait for it. So far from being brain-

less, Donna Clara— But why pursue these futile recriminations? She's the last. I shan't go about looking for it any more. Perhaps I shall live and die a bachelor. I recognized all the symptoms with Donna Clara. I *was* taken with her. I *did* lean out of my window and think about her when I got home; only it was so damn cold that I shut it again directly. I *did* take all the trouble in the world to see her again. But when I did, that was the end of it. I *could* have gone on, but I didn't. I saw that I should be suffering from an agreeable sort of fever for a few weeks, and then I should recover, and have it all to go through again. Pam dear, it isn't good enough."

"Well, I'm not sorry you've come to that conclusion," said Pam. "It came home to me when the affair with Margaret fizzled out. I think the whole business is rather tiresome. You've got lots of other things to do. I suppose a man can go pottering on like that, playing with his emotions. A girl would be rather a beast if she did it. But even in a man I think it's spoiling something or other. I think you're quite right to give it up, if you really mean to."

Norman showed himself a trifle offended over this. "I don't know that you need take it as solemnly as all that," he said. "We've had larks together about it, but I can keep it to myself, if you'd rather."

Pam's eyes filled with tears, which surprised her as much as they did Norman when he saw them. "Oh, don't let's quarrel, even in fun," she said. "It's all unhappy enough without that." Then she broke down and cried, but dried her eyes immediately, angry with

herself. "I've had a horrid thing happen to me," she said. "I didn't mean to tell you about it, but I always have told you everything, almost."

He took her hand. "Dear little Pam," he said. "I know everything is perfectly beastly for you now. I can't do anything about it yet, but you know I hate it as much as you do. I've really come here because of that—at least, you know I should hate not being with you at Christmas. I determined I'd be as merry and bright as possible, but I haven't always felt like it when I've thought about you. If you want to talk over things quietly I'm quite ready."

She gave his hand a squeeze, and withdrew hers. "It isn't about leaving here," she said. "I mind that for poor old Daddy's sake, and it's all part of the general horridness which makes everything different. I suppose I shouldn't mind about this if it weren't for being unhappy about other things."

Then she told him about Fred. "I suppose I did give him some encouragement," she said, "though of course I never meant to." She smiled ruefully. "Perhaps it was that afternoon at Pershore Castle that brought it on me. I was annoyed with you rather, and did it to make you annoyed with me, which you were."

"Oh, yes, I quite understood that," he said. "But why do you let it worry you, Pam dear? You've got rid of the fellow—pretty easily too. You might have had to get rid of him yourself."

"I know. I'm glad I was saved that. I don't know why I feel it as I do, though I've tried to find out. I

can't really blame Fred. Why should I blame him for wanting me? And he didn't even bother me. He went to father."

"And I expect he wishes he hadn't now. I can tell you why you feel it, without looking up any words in a dictionary. He's so far beneath you in every way that it's like a degradation to have him even thinking about you in that way. As for bringing it on—I don't think you could have helped it—a pushing common bounder like that, who wouldn't understand your just being friendly with him. It would have had to come, sooner or later."

"Perhaps you're right, though I don't feel it quite like that. I think I've got myself to blame somewhere. Still, I'm well out of it, and I dare say I shall get over the horrid feeling in time. I hope I shan't have to see him again—not for a long time."

"Of course you'll get over it; and you needn't see him any more, ever—in any way that will matter to you. I wish I could say the same for myself; but the odd thing is that he's got himself in with the governor—in business. He says he's good at it, and a nice enough fellow, who did well in the war. I'm all for treating fellows well who did well in the war, but you do get a bit fed up with some of them, whom you'd never have known but for the old war. I don't suppose Mr. Comfrey would have dared to think about you, before the war. Oh, we've got a lot up against the Kaiser. Let's forget about him, Pam, and forget all about the other bothers, and have a jolly Christmas."

CHAPTER XXVIII

AND THE THIRD

On the afternoon of Christmas Day Norman went out to take the air. There was a cold drizzle of rain, and nobody was inclined to accompany him. He was not sorry to be alone, for he had a good deal to think about, and his thoughts flowed freely as he strode along, buttoned up in his rain coat and rather enjoying the bleak inclemency of the weather, so unlike that of the traditional Christmas. But the Christmas atmosphere was abundantly alive at the Hall, and he carried it with him as he tramped through the mud.

He came back as dusk was falling through the wood at the lower end of the park, and some association of place brought sharply back to his memory the fight he had had with Fred Comfrey down here, years before. He could see Fred and Hugo sitting on the log as he went towards them across the park, and there came to him a return of the feelings with which he had approached them. He came out of the wood at the place where the fallen log had been. It had gone now, but there was Fred, his old-time enemy, standing under a tree, with his eyes fixed upon the Hall, the windows of which were showing their welcoming lights that no longer welcomed him.

He started in surprised affront, as Norman came upon him. It was an awkward meeting, for his reason

for being there was apparent, and he could not help knowing that it was so to Norman. He hunched his shoulders and turned away in offence, without a greeting. Norman, who had been thinking of him with cherished aversion, had an impulse of pity towards him, and obeyed the impulse instantly, as his custom was. "Merry Christmas!" he said. "I heard you were down here."

It was the first thing that came into his head to say, and was only meant as a disclaimer of enmity. But Fred took it has a jeer, and turned on him, his face flaming with antagonism. "I dare say you did," he said. "Damn you! I say something in confidence, and it's told to everybody at once; and I'm kicked out because of it. A merry Christmas!" There followed an oath directed against Norman, and he turned his back on him again.

Norman's impulsion of pity still held him. He had disliked Fred, in their boyhood, but before their final quarrel there had been times in which they had been companions, without hostility between them. That old contact was present to his mind; and Fred was down now; he couldn't triumph over him. "I didn't mean any offence," he said. "I do know what happened, but there's no offence in that either."

Fred turned on him again. "I'm not good enough for her," he said. "No offence in showing me that in the beastliest sort of way, I suppose! I do the straight thing, and it's immediately used as a weapon against me. Yet Eldridge was ready enough to come to me for help in his blasted money difficulties. If he

doesn't mind telling everybody my affairs I don't mind telling his."

Again he turned away, leaving Norman at a loss. He took a few steps, and threw over his shoulder: "You make her think she's everything to you, and behave as if she was nothing. I'd have given her more than you ever will." Then he went away, leaving Norman with something more to think about, as he walked slowly back across the park in the chilly dusk to where the warmth and light of the house was awaiting him.

The next day he went away, and the Hall settled down again to the quiet life that had been brightened by his coming.

The weather cleared after Christmas, and on the first day on which the roads were dry enough Lord Crowborough came tricycling over to Hayslope Hall, and, in the same state of heat as before and with the same means of allaying it by his side, sat talking to his old friend.

He had heard of the decision to let the Hall, and was full of sympathy. At the same time, he couldn't quite understand it. What did William say about it? Surely—!

Colonel Eldridge cut him short. "There's no enmity now between me and William," he said. "We've practically agreed to go our separate ways, though that has never been put into words. William doesn't come into this, and wouldn't have come into it if we had never fallen out. All he could have done would have been to subsidize me here, and I dare say he would

have been quite ready to do it. But of course I couldn't have accepted that in any case."

"No. I can see that, if you put it in that way. But there ought to be a way out, Edmund. He will succeed you here, and I am pretty certain that if you both wanted to you could arrange things."

"Not in any way that wouldn't come round in the long run to my staying here as William's pensioner. The property could be resettled by him and me and Norman agreeing; but there's nothing in it for me beyond my life interest and my wife's jointure. No; I am ready to go now, for some years at least. It's possible that after a time, when I've cleared off certain encumbrances on my income, I might be able to come back. But it isn't time to think of that yet. I shan't be sorry to go, if I can find something suitable to go to. This place has become a burden, and all the pleasure of living in it has departed. The nuisance is that there's no house here for me to go to. The Grange is out of the question, and there's no other house that would do for us without a lot of money spent upon it. I haven't got any money for such purposes."

"It seems hard lines that William should have spoilt the only house in the place that would suit you; and now he doesn't even live in it himself."

"Oh, well; that's done, and there's no good dwelling on it. Things have gone his way and they haven't gone mine. They haven't been going the way of us landowners for a long time, and the war has about finished us. I sometimes wish I'd been born a generation earlier. My father used to grumble sometimes;

but look at the difference between those times and these. Oh, no; it's time I cleared out. There's no room in the world that's coming for people like me."

"Oh, my dear fellow, you mustn't talk like that. There's always room in the world for people like you. We shouldn't have won the war without 'em, for one thing."

"It doesn't seem to have done us much good winning the war. Nothing's the same as it was, and it will get worse. However, we needn't talk about that. We shall have to stick it out, whatever's in store for us. I don't suppose I've got more to grumble about than most. If I can let this house well, as I think I can, and find another somewhere, we shall be all right. I suppose the girls will marry in time. Cynthia and I will have enough, for as long as remains to us."

"I think I might find you a house, Edmund. I've been turning it over in my mind since I heard that you wanted something near here. Give me a few days longer. But I want to know—you didn't tell me. What *does* William say about your leaving Hayslope?"

"I don't suppose he knows. I haven't told him. I dare say Norman has by this time."

"I see Norman was here for Christmas, wasn't he? He's a nice boy, that. I'm glad it shouldn't have made a difference to him."

"So am I—very glad. Yes; he's a very nice boy. He's like a brother to my girls, and I'm glad they've got him, now their own brother is dead. He'll look after them, if they ever want looking after."

"They're dear girls, all of them, Edmund. You won't have them all with you for very long, I expect. I've had a sort of hope lately that—I don't see why such old friends as we are shouldn't talk over these things—I've a fancy that my boy thinks there's nobody in the world like your Pamela. Well, my wife says it's Pamela; I had a sort of idea myself that it was little Judith. It's one of 'em, or I'll eat my hat. Would that be agreeable to you, if it came off some day?"

Colonel Eldridge laughed. "It would be very agreeable to me," he said. "I've had things put to me that weren't so agreeable. Fathers don't seem to have much of a say in these matters nowadays. But, thank goodness, my girls weren't old enough to run all those risks of war-time. Yes, John, if that arrangement would suit you, it would certainly suit me. I've been wondering, quite lately what sort of marriage Pamela would make—realizing that she was old enough to get married, which I suppose doesn't come into a father's head about his eldest girl until it's put there."

"No; or with a son either. But Jim is my only one, and I should like him to marry early, and see my grandson growing up, if I'm spared so long. I shouldn't care for my brother Alfred's boys to come into the succession. However, that's a long way ahead yet. Jim's a steady fellow now, and inclined to take his life seriously—more seriously, perhaps, than we did when we were young fellows; but it's not a bad thing either. What I mean is that I think it would be a good thing for him to marry, and with such a wife as your Pamela

—well, he'd be a very lucky fellow, and she'd get him on in the world. There's still something to do for a man in the position he'll have to fill, and the right sort of wife would help him no end."

When Lord Crowborough had pedalled himself away, Colonel Eldridge went back to his room, and sat there in front of the fire, with pleasanter thoughts to keep him company than he had had for some time. The episode with Fred Comfrey had made its mark upon him, though it had come and gone so quickly that he had suffered little distress because of it. He could hardly help thinking of himself as having come down in the world, since he was no longer able to support the modest dignity that had been his as the head of an old-established family living in the large house in the middle of his acres in which his fathers had lived before him. Fred Comfrey's proposal had seemed to mark that descent, for it had not been from among men such as he that the daughters of the house had taken their husbands. Now this so different proposal wiped out the effect of that one. If only Pamela . . . !

When he told his wife about it, he found that it was no new idea to her. "I didn't want to talk about it," she said, "because one is naturally careful about not appearing to rush at a marriage of that sort. There will be plenty of people to say that we have been angling for it—or that I have—if it does happen. I do think that there's no doubt about Jim. In fact, I shouldn't be in the least surprised if he hadn't put it to Pam already."

"What—do you mean to say that they have come to an understanding?"

"I'm afraid not. If he has asked her, she has refused him. I don't know, because she has said nothing to me; but one has a sort of instinct with one's own daughters. Perhaps it's more likely that she won't give him an answer yet. They are as good friends as ever. I don't think he would come here in the way he does if she had refused him definitely."

This rather dashed him. "Crowborough said something about Judith," he said. "He'd had an idea that she was the attraction; but her ladyship seems to have chased that idea out of his head."

Mrs. Eldridge laughed, and said: "For once I agree with her. I was inclined to think it was Judith at one time myself, though I'd hardly come to think of her as more than a child. They get on splendidly together, and really I think she'd be more suited to him than Pam. However, there's no good thinking of that, for it is Pam, and there's no doubt about it. Darling Pam! I do wish she would come round to it. She is taking our present troubles hardly, and it would be good for her to be lifted out of them. Perhaps she will, in time. But there's no good in pressing her; we must just leave it."

"Oh, pressing her! Good heavens, no! I shouldn't like her to marry him for the reasons that would appeal to us, either. I believe in a love match, for everybody; but there ought to be something behind it too."

Mrs. Eldridge leant over his chair and kissed him on

the forehead. "We've never regretted our love match, have we?" she said.

He reached up and took her hand in his. "We hardly thought it was going to bring us to this pass towards the close of our lives," he said. "But it won't part us, so it's not so bad. Crowborough said he might be able to find a house for us. There are several nice little places on his property. If one of them fell vacant, I could carry on here from it. Otherwise, I don't see anything for it but to put in an agent, and only come down now and then. I think now we've made up our minds, the worst is over. I wish William had written, though. He couldn't do anything to help us, perhaps; but I should have thought it must have meant something to him—our having to clear out. Norman must have told him, and there would have been time to hear from him by now."

"If there's nothing he could do," she said, "perhaps it's as well that he should leave it alone. We don't want the contrast between us made plainer than it is."

With that she left him. She could not trust herself to talk with him about his brother, against whom her anger was hot within her. She knew with what a weight the estrangement was lying upon him now; that the irritation he had felt against William had all disappeared; and that he was inclined to blame himself for all that had happened, to the justification of the man who was pursuing his eager successful course without an apparent thought of the troubles from which he had cut himself loose. She had hoped something from William until now. Looking back upon the

whole course of the quarrel, she did recognize that he had made efforts to end it, and shown here and there the generosity which had always been a mark of his character. But, after all, his generosity had been easy to exercise. They had all lived in close contact for years, and he had got as good as he had given, in the affection which had prompted his generosity. Now that had fallen into the second place with him; he was in pursuit of associations other than the ties of family, and it was to further them that his openhandedness would be used. What did they matter to him at Hayslope? He had run away from the place in which so many of his interests had been bound up, rather than face the awkwardness of a situation which he could have ended at any time by a little patience and consideration. Even their leaving it was nothing to him now. Four days had gone by since he must have been told of it. He was not away, for Norman had written to Pam only the day before, and mentioned him. It must be accepted now that he didn't care. It would be as well that her husband should come to recognize that, and then he would cease longing for what was over and done with, and rely only upon those who loved him so dearly for his solace in life.

But she couldn't hasten the time. He must be made sadder yet before he could put away his sadness, and accept the new conditions.

She talked to Pamela that night. No pressure was to be put on her, she had said. She put all the pressure of which she was capable, being very careful to disguise the fact that she was putting any pressure

at all. She loved Pamela more than her other girls; she was making more and more of a companion of her; she would hate giving her up to the best of husbands. But to please her own husband, to get for him, something that would lift from him some of the weight under which he was drooping, she would have pushed her daughter into a marriage with less prospects of happiness in it than this held out. She was ruthless with her, while talking to her with a sort of cooing tenderness and sympathy, and searching among half confessions and confidences for the point upon which she could concentrate to move her. Her father was mentioned but rarely. There was no plea to sacrifice herself for his sake. But it was inherent in everything that she said that submission on Pamela's part would bring something to him that nothing else could in these shadowed days. She did not place before her any of the advantages that would accrue to her from a marriage that would bring her wealth and station. She mentioned them only to make light of them. *They* knew, she and Pamela, that those were not the best things in life, though one was better off with them than without them. What were the best things? They seemed to be summed up in Horsham, according to her opinion, though she did not overpraise him.

No disagreement was possible with anything that she said. She put herself apparently into complete accord with Pamela, and made it difficult for her so much as to say that she didn't love Horsham; for that would have been the answer to an invitation that was never made, in so many words. The respect and even

affection that Pamela was made to acknowledge as representing her feelings towards Horsham were taken as the most satisfactory with which to start upon married life. That was apparently agreed on all hands, and was hardly worth discussing. The question of "falling in love" was lightly touched upon. It sometimes happened before marriage, sometimes afterwards. The marriages that began with youthful raptures didn't always turn out the most satisfactory. It seemed to be indicated that there was something almost indelicate in a girl's looking out for those raptures; she would have no fear of such a desire in a daughter of hers.

They ended their long talk under the supposition that Pamela wouldn't marry for years to come, and discussed the future hopefully. It would be splendid if Lord Crowborough did find them a nice house, near enough to Hayslope for father to be able to look after things from there. They could furnish a house of three or four sitting-rooms and eight or ten bedrooms beautifully from the Hall, and leave quite enough behind them. They could have a lovely garden, and there would probably be enough land for a little farmery, in which they would all interest themselves. "I'm sure we should be much happier than we are here now," Mrs. Eldridge said. "I think even father has come to see that, and if he gets rid of his worries we shall have him with us for many years to come, just as he used to be. He is more cheerful now than he has been for a long time, though he isn't well. I do think there's a brighter time coming for us at last."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE NEW CHAPTER

Miss Baldwin came back to Hayslope after the Christmas holidays not without hopes of developments having taken place during her absence, which would introduce the new chapter she was longing for. Her return after holidays was always greeted with welcoming chatter by Alice and Isabelle, who were of an age when even the arrival of a governess to whom they were not greatly attached was something of an excitement. Miss Baldwin never seemed to take much interest in the news they poured out to her, and she asked very few questions; but she had gathered a good deal by the time her charges were in bed and her time was her own to think it over.

The coming move was the most important piece of news. The excitement of the children over any change was enough in this instance at least to balance their regrets at leaving Hayslope. It was not quite settled yet, but it was almost certain that they were going some time in the spring to live at that dear old farmhouse which you passed on the road to Pershore, about half a mile before you came to the Castle. Miss Baldwin remembered it quite well, and the news gave her rather a shock, though the children seemed to be delighted with the idea. It was an old stone-built house standing very near the road, with its farmstead ad-

joining it—hardly a gentleman's residence, in her opinion, and a great come down from Hayslope Hall. But it was the farm buildings, which would go with it, that made it attractive in the eyes of Alice and Isabelle. And they were to have ponies. That would have made up for more than they would actually lose by the move. Lord Crowborough was going to do a good deal to the house before they went to it. It was bigger than it looked from the outside, and there was a lovely great attic running the whole length of the house where they would be able to play.

So the children were satisfied, and Miss Baldwin had gathered from the talk at supper that their elders thought themselves fortunate in finding such a house for themselves. There was talk of panelled rooms and a fine oak staircase, and of restorations that were to be made to bring it back to the state from which it had somewhat fallen. It was a house of the same quality as Town Farm at Hayslope. Colonel Eldridge's chief regret seemed to be that he could not restore his own house in the same way, instead of renting one from somebody else.

To Miss Baldwin's observant eyes, Colonel Eldridge seemed to have aged since she had last seen him. He had been unwell, and was not quite himself yet, though he wouldn't acknowledge it. But the change in him didn't come from that. He was depressed and silent, and made fewer efforts to conceal his mood before his family than was his custom. Miss Baldwin wondered whether his family knew everything that was behind this somewhat startling change in his life. Was he

hiding anything from them? Was he a secret gambler, with a chapter to come in which his horses would be led away from the door, and his wife would lean over a ruined man with bent head and nervous fingers clutching a pack of cards? But she rejected the idea. Colonel Eldridge only had one horse, and an old pony, and he could hardly be induced to make a four at family Bridge, with stakes of threepence a hundred. The estrangement from his brother still continued; she had gathered that. There was something there to wonder about, perhaps a recently discovered will, perhaps the change of an heir at birth. Time would show. There was not enough yet to alter the interest of a love story into one of mystery.

She divined, with some special sense that she had, that Fred Comfrey was a definitely rejected suitor; though the children had hardly mentioned his name and the others not at all. But it could not have been that which made Pamela almost as silent and sad-looking as her father, in spite of her efforts to behave with her usual brightness, and especially so to him. It was only at odd moments that Miss Baldwin caught the look on her face which told her so much; and the silence was for when her father and mother were not there.

What was it then that was troubling her? Miss Baldwin formed many conjectures, but recognized that she must wait for further material in order to set her thoughts to one of them.

The occasion that she wanted came two days after she had returned to Hayslope. Lord Horsham came

over to lunch, and stayed for the afternoon. He was going back to Oxford the next day.

Pamela's spirits had come back to her. She laughed and chattered in her old way. Lord Horsham had never had such a reception from her in Miss Baldwin's recollection, though all of them were brought into it, and there was no time that Miss Baldwin knew of when she was alone with him during that lively afternoon. When he had gone, she relapsed into her listless mood, which was even more marked than it had been before.

So now Miss Baldwin knew. Pamela loved Lord Horsham, and any separation from him lay heavy upon her spirits. She wondered what had brought the change, for Pamela had certainly not been in love with him a month ago. As for him, there was no doubt about it. He was head over ears, and showed it plainly. It could not be long now before that chapter, and with it the whole story, was satisfactorily closed.

Colonel Eldridge had a great deal of estate work to do now, which had fallen somewhat into arrears during the days he had been laid up. Besides hours spent in his office, where there was now only a clerk to help him, he had to be out constantly, and in all weathers. Mrs. Eldridge tried to dissuade him from going about so much, but he was not a man who would respond to such dissuasion, with the result that he caught another bad cold and had to take to his bed. There she had him to some extent at her mercy, but she could not prevent him worrying himself over what ought to have been done, but couldn't be done, or from busying him-

self with papers, when he ought to have been lying still doing nothing.

He began to mend on the third day, and proposed to get up on the next. She took up his breakfast herself, and his letters, and then went down to her own. When she went up again, he was lying still, with very little breakfast eaten and half his letters unopened. She persuaded him to eat a little more, and he talked to her for a time, and then said he should like a message sent over to ask Lord Crowborough to come and see him. He thought he would go to sleep in the meantime; there wouldn't be much to do this morning; better take full advantage of his last day in bed. He smiled at her and said that she was not to come bothering him until Lord Crowborough came. He wanted to see him about something particularly. Perhaps she'd better send the car for him, and a note. No, he would write the note himself. She was to go down and order the car, while he wrote it.

An hour or so later Lord Crowborough was ushered into his room, with a face of concern. This was apparently on account of Colonel Eldridge's illness, for he was quite cheerful with Mrs. Eldridge until she left them, with instructions not to interrupt their confabulation, which might take some time. But when the door had been shut behind her his face was more concerned than ever as he came to the bedside, and said: "You've had some bad news, Edmund. I'm very sorry to hear that. And you're not in a fit state for it, either. I can see that."

Colonel Eldridge handed him a letter. "You're the

only man, I suppose, who knows all about it," he said. "Is it true?"

Lord Crowborough read the letter through, with pursing of the lips, and a deepening frown. Colonel Eldridge watched his face anxiously for a time, and then turned his eyes away, and lay quite still until he had finished.

Lord Crowborough glanced at him, when he had come to the end, and waited a moment before speaking. Then he folded the letter and said: "Yes, Edmund, it's true, in all essentials; but what a wicked thing to send it to you! The woman must be mad."

Colonel Eldridge roused himself. "Oh, you see what she says. It has been lying on her conscience . . . Spiritualism, and all that. . . . She wants excitement, of course. We needn't bother about her; she's had the money, thank goodness. She can't do anything more, except put it about, which I dare say she will do, though she swears she won't. It's you I'm thinking of, John. I quarrelled with you for saying it; I behaved badly to you. I . . ."

Lord Crowborough lifted hands of deprecation. "Oh, my dear Edmund; my dear fellow! I ought not to have taken the line I did about it. I regretted it very much afterwards, when the poor boy was killed. Don't think anything more about that. And don't let it affect you towards his memory. He'd gone wrong; yes, more than you knew; but he made up for it in the end. I've thought kindly of him, you know, for a long time past, and I knew it all the time. Perhaps it would have been better if you had known it at

the first. It's a blow, coming now. But nothing is changed by it. You must put it aside. You will, in time. It's all forgiven."

There was silence for a time. Then Colonel Eldridge said: "You're kind and good about it, John. I knew you would be, when I sent for you. And you've been kind all along. I know now that my son—cheated—yours out of a large sum of money, besides pushing him into something that he'd never have taken up, if he had been left to himself. I know Horsham well enough to say that; and my son was an older man, who ought to have looked after him—coming into the Regiment as a boy—the son of one of my oldest friends. It was very bad. I can't quite bring my mind to it. But the first thing to be done is to arrange for the payment—"

Lord Crowborough had tried to break in once or twice, and now did so decisively. "My dear Edmund, the money was paid. William knew, and he insisted on doing it. I couldn't refuse. Whatever I might have done, if I'd been left to myself, I don't deserve the credit of that. There's nothing more to be done there."

"William paid, you say?"

"Yes. Fortunately I told him all about it—you knew that, didn't you? It was when I was still very angry, and had let out to you what I did, that you took such exception to. I hope I should have done afterwards what I did do, and draw back from what I had said, so as to keep the knowledge of it from you. But it was William who showed me that it was the right

thing to do, and almost directly afterwards the poor boy was killed, and then I can tell you I was very glad that I hadn't pressed it with you. William saw it at once. He made me take a cheque for the—for the loss, then and there, and promise never to mention it again, even to him. I've wished lately . . ."

He broke off. "You've wished lately that I'd known that," said Colonel Eldridge quietly. "So do I. One doesn't quarrel with men who treat one like that."

Lord Crowborough didn't quite understand him. "I don't think you need consider it as an extra obligation," he said. "I know it was over and done with, for William, when he wrote his cheque, and made me promise to say nothing about it. I've talked to him since, as you know, and he was extremely irritated against you—no sense in pretending he wasn't—but *that* never came up. I'm sure he's never grudged it, whatever has happened since."

"I wasn't thinking about the money. I've thought too much about William's money, and talked too much about it, to you among others. His money made it easy for him, perhaps, to pay what had to be paid; but it had nothing to do with his taking pains to keep me from knowledge of my son's disgrace."

Lord Crowborough brightened. "Oh, I'm so glad you've said that, Edmund," he said. "You've both misunderstood each other, and you've drifted apart. My dear fellow, if this brings you together again—Oh, I shall be so glad of that."

Again there was silence for a time. Then Colonel Eldridge said: "Horsham knows, I suppose. He and

this—this woman's son joined together, didn't they? It was plain to all of them."

Lord Crowborough had forgotten for the moment what a shock the certain knowledge of his son's disgrace must have been to him, and set himself to remove the effects of it from his mind. Colonel Eldridge accepted what he said, listlessly, but it was evident that no words could heal the wound that had been dealt him. Only time could do that. Even the knowledge of his brother's action, which had changed the current of his thoughts for a time seemed to have brought him only temporary relief. He seemed hardly interested in it now. There was an air of hopeless depression on him that Lord Crowborough was quite unable to remove.

He roused himself to agree upon what steps to take. There was little that could be done. Lord Crowborough himself answered the letter then and there. He wrote on behalf of his friend, who was ill. His own son had been concerned in the affair about which Mrs. Barrett had written to Colonel Eldridge, and all the facts were known to him. Until now they had not been known to Colonel Eldridge. He would not pretend that he understood the motives which had led her to deliver such a blow to a man who had lost his only son, and thus immeasurably increase his grief. He would only beg of her to let the story go no farther.

He directed and closed the letter without offering to show it to Colonel Eldridge, who made no request that he should do so. Then he burnt the letter that had worked such mischief, and soon afterwards he went

away, very disturbed in his mind at what had taken place, and what its effects might be.

Colonel Eldridge lay in bed all that day, doing nothing, and not wishing to talk. The next day he got up, and went about his business as usual, though Mrs. Eldridge begged him to stay in the house.

CHAPTER XXX

THE TRODDEN WAY

It was a wild night of wind and rain. Mrs. Eldridge and Pamela sat in the morning-room, waiting. Every now and then Mrs. Eldridge would go upstairs, and creep quietly into her husband's room, to see if he was still asleep. Then she would come down again, and they would sit still, talking very little, while the big clock in the corner ticked on, and the gusts of rain blew against the window-panes.

Colonel Eldridge had come in the evening before, shivering, and had gone to bed. In the morning his temperature was high, but he said he felt better, and refused to have a doctor sent for. Mrs. Eldridge, however, took that matter into her own hands, and sent for one, who came towards the end of the morning. He took a grave view of the case, and feared pneumonia. He would come again in the evening, and bring a nurse with him. It might be late before he came. There was a lot of illness about, and nurses were difficult to get.

There was no telephone at the Hall, but there was one at the Grange. Pamela and Judith had spent most of the afternoon there. At last the doctor had telephoned that a nurse was coming down from London by the last train. He would meet her and bring her himself.

The train arrived at a quarter past eleven, and it was half an hour's motor-run to the Hall. On such a night as this it might take longer.

The time crept on. Soon after half-past eleven Pamela sprang up from her chair. "I'm sure I heard a motor," she said, and ran to the window.

"It's too early yet," Mrs. Eldridge said; but Pamela had drawn back the curtains. The strong headlights of a big car were already swinging round to the hall door.

They went out, and Mrs. Eldridge opened the door, as the bell rang. It was Lord Eldridge who was standing there, already unfastening his heavy fur coat.

He slipped it off as he came in. He was in his evening clothes. "How is he?" he asked, without any other greeting. "Has the nurse come yet?"

Many emotions crossed Mrs. Eldridge's mind, but the chief of them, in spite of her disappointment, and the resentment she had nurtured against him, was relief at his appearance; for it seemed to her that if anything ought to be done, he could do it.

When he heard of the nurse expected, he considered, watch in hand, whether it would be worth while to motor back in his fast car towards the station, but decided against it. In a few minutes the doctor and the nurse would be coming. He went into the morning-room with Pamela, while Mrs. Eldridge went upstairs again.

"I only got your message just before nine o'clock," he said. "They didn't know where to find me."

She stood before him, looking up into his face. "I

haven't told mother I tried to get you," she said, "in case you couldn't come. I knew you would if you could, Uncle Bill."

"Oh, my dear, of course. Poor dear fellow! But he'll get over it. We'll pull him round between us."

There was such an air of energy and resource about him that it seemed as if he could do more than a nurse or a doctor. He was wiping his face, which was red, and wet with the rain. He told her hurriedly that he had come up from Suffolk only that afternoon, and had gone to his club for the night. He had dined out, and her message had passed to and fro until it had found him, when he had come straight away. "If I'd only gone home, as I might have done," he said, "I should have been here hours ago, and might have brought a nurse down with me."

He put his arm round her as she bent her head to hide her tears. "There, there, my dear!" he said consolingly. "Don't worry. It will be all right now."

She dried her eyes. "I don't want mother to see me upset," she said; "but I've been so frightened. Father has hardly ever been ill, until lately. He has been so worried and unhappy, I suppose he couldn't throw it off. I'm sure it will be the best thing for him that you have come at once, like this."

A shade passed over his face. "I'd have come before if I'd thought he would want me," he said. "It's been an unhappy business, but it's all over now. It *shall* be all over. I've taken offence too readily. I won't take offence at anything now."

"I'm sure there'll be nothing to take offence at," she said, a little stiffly. "When you see him, you'll only be sorry for him."

Mrs. Eldridge came in at that moment. "He's awake," she said. "He had heard the car and I had to tell him it was you who had come, William. He wants to see you. I don't know—"

"If he wants it!" he said, preparing to go. "I shan't upset him, Cynthia. And the doctor ought to be here directly."

She took him upstairs. "He's very ill," she said, in a colourless voice. "I know he is, though he says he isn't. I'm sure he mustn't be excited. But I had to tell him you were here, and he would see you at once."

"I shan't excite him," he said shortly.

They went into the room. Colonel Eldridge was lying in his bed in a corner of the room, with a shaded reading-lamp by his side. He hardly looked ill, and he greeted his brother in his ordinary voice. "Well, Bill, I'm glad you've come, though it's a beastly night to get you out. You didn't walk through the wood, did you?"

His brother understood at once that he was light-headed. "No, old boy," he said, taking his hand in his. "I came in the car. I thought I must look in and see how you were. You'll have the doctor here in a minute. I'll keep you company till he comes."

He sat down by the bed, while Mrs. Eldridge stood, not knowing what to do. "You can leave me and Bill for a bit," her husband said. "I want to talk to him about that four acre field at Barton's Close. I don't

think it's much good for pasture where it is. I thought he might like to take it into his garden. Just see if you can find the big estate map in my room."

She went out slowly. "That's a good idea, Edmund," William said in a quiet voice. "We can talk it over when you're better. I shouldn't think about it now, if I were you. Let me make you a bit more comfortable."

He rearranged the bedclothes, which his brother had thrown off, talking in a soothing voice as he did so. Colonel Eldridge was in a high fever. He thought it was his father who was with him, and said: "William didn't want to get into the punt. It was me who made him."

What strange things come to the surface of the mind when it is no longer under control! Years ago, when they were children, they had been upset from a shooting punt, into which they had been forbidden to go. It was one of countless such pranks that had been forgotten, or at least never brought to memory. It came to William now that his brother had always taken blame on himself for any of them that had turned out unfortunately, and touched him acutely. It was his elder brother who was lying there, until lately the person most looked up to in all his world. His heart was constricted with a poignant emotion, and his voice trembled as he said words that would calm the rapid flow of his speech, now becoming more incoherent. Oh, if only they could pull him through this, he would never allow himself again to treat him as anything but the elder brother, whom he could uphold, but must not

gainsay. What would it matter if he was sometimes unreasonable? There was no one else in the world to whom it was so worth while to give in; no one who carried with him that sense of rightful authority, even of protection. He had been borne down by his troubles. Were any of them his brother's making?

The doctor and the nurse came in. William was sent out of the room at once.

By the next day they seemed to have settled down to the struggle for a life, as if nothing else in the world mattered. Lord Eldridge, after a few hours' sleep, had motored back to London, to find and bring down another nurse. He had sent for his wife to come to the Grange, and set in hand all arrangements for their staying there, and for the carrying on of such of his work as could not be left undone. He was back at the Hall before mid-day, looking as if he had been doing nothing out of the usual run, but with a deep gravity underlying his capable confidence-bearing demeanour. His contact with Mrs. Eldridge was almost impersonal. She relied on him, and talked with him about what was to be done without any sense of awkwardness. Her resentments were not solved; they were just put aside. But for the girls the estrangement was over and done with. They clung to his authority and resource, and to his warm supporting affection, which he showed towards them so abundantly.

Soon after he had returned, Mrs. Eldridge came to him and said that her husband wanted to see him. He was quite himself now. The nurse had said that he had better have his way, but Lord Eldridge must be care-

ful not to excite him, and must not stop in the room long.

The weight of past trouble was upon Mrs. Eldridge now. She hesitated and faltered, and it was plain that she disliked being the bearer of this message.

"My dear Cynthia," he said, "if he wants to see me, it is because he wants our dispute to be put an end to, once for all. I want that too, and you can trust me to think of nothing but to set his mind at rest. Don't think of me as an enemy any longer."

She made no reply, but led him up to the room.

His brother's eyes were upon him, as he went in, with an expression that was sorrowful, but also welcoming. "Well, William," he said, in a low but audible voice, "it does me good to see you here. I seem to be worse than I thought I was, but we can have a little chat. It was good of you to come, after all that has happened."

"My dear old fellow, don't let's talk about what has happened. I've been very much to blame; but you have always had a lot to put up with in my ways of doing things. Yet we've been friends all our lives, and nothing is ever going to part us again."

He had taken his hand, and given it a gentle pressure. His brother held it in his for an appreciable time, and then grasped it with a meaning that was plain enough without further words. William sat down by his side, with a sensation of choking in his throat. Their quarrel was at an end.

"There's a lot to settle," Colonel Eldridge said. "I may not be fit to talk to you again. If I don't get

over this, you'll look after Cynthia and the children. They'll have enough, but I've always directed all our affairs; she'll be lost at first."

William forced himself with a great effort to speak naturally and evenly. "You'll get over it, my dear old fellow," he said confidently; "but I agree that it's best to be prepared. We've been like one family, until lately, and that's what we are again now. You were quite right in saying that I had spoilt the Grange for them, or I'd have looked after them there. They shall stay here, dear Edmund. The old place will be more like it has always been with them in it, and as I like it to be, than with us living in it. I'm committed to another sort of life now, and it's too late to go back. But we shall be down here often, in the old way. They'll have us to depend upon, in whatever they can't do for themselves."

"You haven't bought that other place?"

"No. I did think of it; but I shall give it up after this season, anyhow. If all goes well, as I'm sure it will, if you set your mind to getting better, we shall come back here, to the Grange, and you must let me join you in a closer partnership. You'll be here to look after the place in a way I couldn't do; you'll go on running it in your own way, which couldn't be bettered, but under all the new conditions there's room for capital and business methods in estate management, which I'm in a position to bring in. We can do better with Hayslope if we work together; we can get as much out of it as ever."

Colonel Eldridge sighed. "It is what ought to have

been done," he said. "And you have always been ready to do it, I know. You'll do better for the place than I could now, and for my family. I've thought of them always; but I've not done the best for them that could have been done. I think I did before, but I've been too slow to see that it wasn't in my power any longer. I shall leave it all to you, William, and go with a quiet mind, if I have to go. Thank God, you can do what I couldn't and that I've come round to trusting to you for it before it's too late. Perhaps all the girls won't be here at home much longer. I should have liked to know that Pamela would be happily married; but that can't be hurried. There are other things to settle, William. We mustn't lose time. Poor Hugo . . . there's something I want to tell you . . . you know something of it. Oh, and Crowborough told me what you'd done, when it first came out. I haven't thanked you for that. There's such a lot to talk about."

He was getting restless. William put a quietening hand upon him. "I know everything," he said. "Don't let's waste time over that. I know about Mrs. Barrett, and the money. Young Comfrey told me of the new demand. He ought not to have done it, but I'm very glad he did. I can take all that on me now, Edmund. You won't want to hold out any longer, will you? I know you won't. I'm *very* sorry, dear old fellow, for the resentment I've been keeping up; and ashamed of it. If you leave it all to me, and put it out of your mind once for all, you'll give me more comfort and pleasure than you could in any other way."

He seemed to be controlling his mind to a new idea.

"Yes," he said, at last, and more quietly. "It's one of the many things that you'll do for me. You've been generous all through, and I've been stiff and ungrateful."

The nurse and Mrs. Eldridge came in. William took his brother's hand in his, and they looked into one another's faces. It was a momentary look, but there was nothing to interrupt the message it carried, of understanding, and affection, and trust.

William went downstairs, and found Pamela there. He was much moved, and could not hide his emotion from her. She loved him the better for it. "You don't think he's worse, do you, Uncle Bill?" she asked him. "He *will* get better, won't he?"

"One always thinks of strong people you've never seen ill worse than they are," he said, to explain his emotion. "Yes, I think he'll get better now. I've had very little time with him, but I've been able to relieve his mind of some things that have lain heavy on it. I think there's nothing he need worry about now; and I shall be able to talk to him again. It's been a sad business, Pam—our quarrel. I've been very much to blame, but it's all over now. I don't want to think too much about it, as he won't, any longer. The way has been made clear for us to help each other in what we want done. You won't be leaving Hayslope, my dear. That's settled, at any rate."

"I shall be very glad of that, if he gets better," she said quietly. "Uncle Bill, I wish you'd send for Lord Crowborough."

"My dear, you mustn't get thinking that he won't

recover. I'm not going to let myself think it. I believe, somehow, that if we fight against that idea in our minds, it will help him to fight through himself."

"Oh, yes, I know. But if he doesn't! I've made Nurse Mary tell me, if he doesn't get better, it can't last very long. I think he would like to see Lord Crowborough; he has depended on him a good deal lately, and he has always cheered him up when he has been over. Do send for him, will you, Uncle Bill?"

He was a little surprised at her earnestness, but promised to do what she wished. "I'll telephone over directly I get to the Grange," he said.

"He isn't at the Castle," she said. "They went up to London a few days ago. You'll telephone to him there, won't you? I know he will come down, if he knows how ill father is. Tell him that I asked you to."

He promised to do that, and left her. She stood at the window, and saw him go across the lawn and under the bare branches of the trees down into the wood. She stood there for a long time, after he had disappeared, and when she turned back to the room her face was sad but composed.

The illness ran its quick course, which seemed to drag interminably to those who could do little but watch it. There were slight fluctuations, but never much hope of recovery, at least to those who had had experience of such an illness. To his children, who saw him sometimes for a few minutes when he was at his best, it seemed impossible that he should be nearing his end. He would smile at them, and say a few words. They

were always words that they would remember afterwards—as if he had thought out what he could say in so short a time, that would not sadden them with the idea that he expected to die, and yet would not waste the precious time he had still to be with them. He sent for Timbs and old Jackson, and one or two more of the servants and the villagers. To all of these he had something definite to say which was not a farewell; but they would count it so afterwards.

Lord Crowborough had left London for Bath. He wired to say he was coming on the fourth day, by the train which arrived in the middle of the afternoon. It was doubtful whether he would be able to see Colonel Eldridge that day; but it had been arranged that he was to stay at the Grange.

Lord Eldridge's car had been sent to the station. It might be back at any time now. Pamela was alone in the morning-room. It had come to be recognized that it was she who had pressed for him to come, and pressed again when it had seemed impossible to get him. It was she who was to receive him; she had asked that she should.

She sat motionless in front of the fire, except that once or twice she turned her head to listen. The big car made very little noise; she was on the alert to catch the first sounds of it.

At last it came—the crunching of the wet gravel, heard as soon as the purring of the engine. She sprang up, as if she would go out to meet the arrival, but stood still, as if, after all, she was unable to stir. Her hand went to her heart, and there was a look

almost of fright on her face, as she stood in front of the fire, looking towards the door.

It opened, but she could not move. Then her face changed altogether, with a breaking up of its expression of strain, and she gave a little cry. For it was not Lord Crowborough, but Norman who came quickly into the room.

CHAPTER XXXI

AN ENDING AND A BEGINNING

Pamela was sobbing in Norman's arms when Lord Crowborough came into the room almost immediately after him. She controlled herself with a great effort, and found herself able to talk to Lord Crowborough, while Norman went to find his father and mother, who were both in the house.

Lord Crowborough was in great distress, but he had to explain fully why he had not been able to come earlier, and to express his regret at the delay. Perhaps his deliberate detailed speech calmed her. She would not acknowledge to him that hope was small. "When he is well enough it will be a great pleasure to him to see you," she said. "I knew he would want to, and that anything that cheers him up must be good for him. That's why I persuaded Uncle William to go on until he got you. I knew you would come if you could."

"Oh, yes, my dear; oh, yes. It's dreadfully sad. I should never have forgiven myself if I hadn't come in time. Poor, dear fellow! It gave me a great shock to get the news. Dear, dear! I can't believe it now."

He was not consoling, in his evident expectation of the worst, but Pamela seemed to have strength enough to combat his pessimism. "He will get better," she

said confidently. "He was better this morning. To-morrow I am sure he will be able to see you."

Lord Crowborough found it necessary to explain why his wife had been unable to come with him. "But I've sent for Jim," he said. "He'll be here to-morrow. I wish I'd sent for him before. Norman left Cambridge this morning, he tells me."

She showed a momentary confusion, but said: "I think father will be pleased to see Jim too, if he is well enough. We're all very fond of Jim."

He looked at her and cleared his throat preparatory to some speech of special meaning, as it seemed; but fortunately for her Lord and Lady Eldridge came into the room before he could utter it. Norman was with them, and as their elders engaged in greetings he and Pamela slipped away together.

They went into Colonel Eldridge's room, which was being used now, perhaps with the idea of keeping it alive and expectant of him. Norman took her two hands into his, and said: "Pam darling, it has been you all the time, but I've only just found it out."

She allowed her tears to fall then. "I've wanted you dreadfully, lately," she said. "If only father gets better, we shall all be very happy now."

That was almost the extent of their love-making. They had known each other for so long. What was in the mind of each gained instant response from the other. Pamela could take refuge from her deep trouble in his love; joy in their new discovery could wait.

The discovery itself, however, must not be kept to themselves. Lord Crowborough was the only person

whom it seemed somewhat to disconcert, but he joined with the rest in the desire to make it known to Pamela's father. They would get his blessing upon it, which would be a happiness to them to remember in after years. And it would please and comfort him.

Lord Eldridge, still cherishing determined hope, expected much from it. Whether he was abundantly pleased himself, or only moderately so, did not appear, for he seemed to accept it only as it might affect his brother. But he did accept it; and Lady Eldridge made it plain to Pamela, with a warm embrace, what it meant to her. Poor Mrs. Eldridge, who hardly left the sickroom now, treated it as unimportant. But she had greeted her sister-in-law in a way to show that the late estrangement was not now in her mind; and she no longer held herself aloof in any way from her brother-in-law. Perhaps unconsciously she took it as bringing them all more closely together. She wanted all the support now that family affection and sympathy could give her.

Pamela stood with Norman by her father's bedside the next morning, and he smiled at them with full knowledge, and whispered a word to her as she kissed him. He saw no one else but his wife that day, and on the afternoon of the next he died. All his family were around him, but he did not know them. There was none of whom he had not already taken leave, and he had left them with no trouble on his mind on their behalf, except the great sorrow of his loss, which time would change into a most loving memory.

Time had already softened the sorrow when Spring came treading its flowery way over the gardens of Hayslope and the country round them. If there were still tears shed at the Hall there was sometimes laughter too, from the young people whose life lay all before them, and on whom no burden of loss could rest forever. And care was lifted from the house, though at a very heavy price.

Mrs. Eldridge sometimes asked herself if it was possible that she should ever come to enjoy life again, the question being prompted not by the desire to do so, but by an uneasy suspicion of disloyalty because she was beginning to find these bright soft spring days pleasant, in the house and in the garden. She need not have feared, for she never had that sensation of grateful expectancy which is spring's message and bright consolation without an immediate pang to follow it. She had not made herself his constant companion in the comings and goings of his days, but never for very long together had she been without the sense of his being there. When she had most seemed to be taking her own way, her life in its ultimate ends had yet been lived with reference to him. Now she had to adopt a life not so very different from that which she had led before at Hayslope to a new impulsion. The life was pleasant enough in itself, but at present it seemed to count for nothing. The days came, ran their quiet course, and ended. Each one carried her a little farther from the time when she had had him with her. And she would live them for years to come, with nothing to look forward to. So it seemed to her when

she thought about it; and presently she found it was better not to think about it, but to take the days as they came. Then her spirit quieted itself by degrees, and her grief became less bewildering.

She and Lady Eldridge were close friends again now. There had been a time, after her husband's death, when she had put it down to the trouble through which he had gone on account of his brother. Then she had held herself aloof from them. But the feeling had faded away. What did it matter now? He was dead. Keeping up the quarrel in her mind would not bring him back. And he had been so glad to have it ended. He had given her and his children over to his brother's keeping, in solemn words to her, almost the last of any he had spoken. Her mind was too tired to think it out. She just let go of the feeling, and presently it died.

William was very good to her, and she recognized that his goodness came from his love for his brother, whose wishes in anything to do with Hayslope it was his guiding principle to follow. He took all money affairs into his hands. He had assured her that the substantial income she had to spend was due to her, and not supplemented by him, except that he asked her to live at the Hall, as long as it suited her, and she paid no rent for it. He professed great frankness with her, and told her that the lines upon which he was dealing with her income enabled him to make more of it. She did not ask how it was done; she was content, for herself and her girls, to live quietly for the present at Hayslope, under his protective influence.

They were all one family again now, though its headship had shifted.

One windy day of early April, when the daffodils were gleaming and swaying under the trees, and all the air was clean and sweet, Norman and Pamela walked together in the garden and down through the wood. Norman had just come home from Cambridge. He and Pamela had been very little together since the discovery of their love for one another, under the sorrow that had prompted it but forbidden that absorption in themselves which is the usual effect of such discoveries. Perhaps their love was all the deeper because of the sorrow. Pamela had clung to Norman in her grief, and had aroused in him the strongest emotion to pity and protection towards her. Their love had struck deep roots during that sad time.

Then had followed the constant interchange of letters, in which all the marvellous phenomena of their mutual attraction had been minutely explored with one hurried week-end visit from Norman, just to assure himself that Pamela was real flesh and blood, and that she loved him as much as she said she did. Now they would be together for a month, before Norman's final term at Cambridge. Already Pamela's sorrow had become gentler. They would often talk very seriously and soberly together; but they were very young, and they were going to be very happy. It would not be forbidden them to be light-hearted during that Easter vacation.

They were discussing the future now. It involved,

immediately, a great deal of work for Norman's final examinations, and a visit from Pamela to Cambridge when their tyranny should be overpast, and more lightsome pursuits would follow. After that?

Well, Cambridge term ends when summer is still young. Wouldn't this be the happiest time for a honeymoon? They would go abroad, to the most beautiful places they could find, within the restricted area which the war had left in Europe for searchers after summer beauty. Then they would come back to England, at the time when England—or perhaps Scotland—offered more than any other country. And some time in the autumn they would make a home for themselves, which gave them more to talk about even than the prospective travels.

Their first home was to be that Town Farm which Colonel Eldridge had so wished he could afford to restore for his own occupation. The visits of the best available architect, and consultation over plans, would very pleasurably occupy the weeks of the vacation. The work would go on while they were abroad, and be finished in the late summer, if the conditions of the building trade permitted. Then there would be the house to furnish, and the garden to make anew. Here was something to dwell upon!

But Pamela had a trifle of doubt in the corner of her mind. "Of course it will be perfectly heavenly living there together," she said. "But I shouldn't like you to lead an altogether idle life."

He laughed at her. "Darling old thing!" he said. "I shall be as busy as the day is long. I had a talk

with father last night, which I wanted to tell you about; but there are so many things to say that you've just got to take them as they come. He says I needn't work with the idea of earning my living. It seems that he has been watching me, when I thought he was so busy about other things that I was out of the orbit of his eagle eye. I hardly know how to tell you this without blushing; but he says that if I'd shown myself any sort of a waster he'd have dumped me down on an office stool and seen that I stuck to it, or made me do something equally beastly until I'd made good for myself. He was quite frank, as only a father can be, and said that he had sometimes thought I was a bit too passionate in the pursuit of pleasure. But he'd come to the conclusion that on the whole I had made whatever I had to do for the time being the chief thing. So he thought I could be trusted not to abuse the freedom he was going to give me. And this is where *you* blush, Pam—he thought you were just the right sort of girl to temper my wayward tendencies. He wasn't sure what I could do best in the world, because I seemed to like doing such lots of things that if he gained an idea of anything special one moment he had to give it up the next. But with you to steady me, I ought to be able to do *something*. He's a wise bird—the Lord Eldridge of Hayslope. He knows how happy we are going to be together, and he's going to let us be as happy as ever we can. Make people happy, and you'll make 'em good."

"He has been very good to us," said Pamela. "I wasn't quite sure that he was really pleased, at first.

It was very sweet of him to talk like that about me. I'm sure there are heaps of things you will do, darling, better than other people; and you know I'll do every mortal thing I can to help you. Uncle Bill shan't be disappointed in me."

"Adorable angel," said Norman. "Father's as pleased as he can be about us. He said he saw it coming all the time. So did mother. It seems so extraordinary that *we* didn't."

The conversation then took a lighter turn. Pamela threw a quick look at him, and said: "Well, you were rather busy looking out for somebody else, weren't you? I often used to wonder who it would be, and I'm bound to say that I never thought it would be me. I can't be blamed. It would have looked so very unlikely."

"Now, Pam, we've had that out before. If I hadn't told you all about all of them as they came and went—especially as they went—I might be inclined to wince at your reminder. But I suppose you only want me to say again that I could never have loved anybody but you for more than a few minutes, and that what I felt for all those charmers put together wasn't a drop in the ocean compared to what I feel for you. Oh, Lord! What a discovery it was! Pam darling, could I have just one? It would be such a refreshment."

There was a short interlude, and then Pam said: "I don't think I really feel jealous about Margaret and Company—Unlimited. It will give us something to talk about in future years. Still, I'm glad that I didn't go about falling in love myself."

"So am I, darling. But people would soon have

begun to fall in love with you. There was poor old Jim already."

She turned her head away, and a blush came to her face. "I'd rather that you didn't talk about him and me like that," she said. "For one thing, he will almost certainly marry Judith some day."

"I suppose so. How are they getting on together? Has he been over since he came down?"

"Yes. It's rather touching to see them. Poor little Ju! She has been frightfully sad, and she's kept it so much to herself. Jim seems to have just the right way with her. She talks about father to him, I know. And he was so nice about us, Norman. I think there's something really fine about Jim, and we've been rather prigs about him. He hasn't got our sort of interests; but Judith hasn't either, and nobody could call her dull. Jim is simple in a large sort of way; and it's a very good quality."

"Yes, I think it is. And he *has* behaved well, for it must have been a bit of a knock for him to come and find you and me as we were. You do think he and Judy will fix it up between them, do you?"

"Not yet. But I think it will come. They're rather like you and me. Each of them is what the other wants, and they'll find it out all of a sudden."

"What has become of Mr. Fred Comfrey, Pam? I haven't seen him since father found out what sort of a fellow he was, and wouldn't have anything more to do with him."

Her face grew shadowed again. "He doesn't come here," she said. "Mrs. Comfrey thinks it is my fault.

At least, she'll hardly speak to me; and I suppose it is that. I'm not sure that I ought not to have given him my answer myself, instead of leaving it to Daddy."

"Oh, my dear child, it was infernal impudence of him to think about you at all—a creature like that!"

"Well, I suppose you have always been right about him. But he showed his best side to me. There was a lot that was good and kind in him."

"Nobody is all bad, I suppose; and even a beast like that rises to something, when he's thinking about somebody else, and not always about himself. The trouble is, though, that it doesn't always last. I've seen it in marriages made in a hurry during the war. What's so heavenly about us, Pam, is that we do know each other; and yet there's always something new, somehow. I don't believe there's anybody in the world loves somebody else more than I love you. And I love you more and more every day. I may have made one or two half-hearted experiments before, but there was never anything like this."

"Not even when Margaret said 'Good-bye, Norman'?"

"That was a thrill, I admit. But what a faint thrill, after all! Nothing like what I get every time you come into a room. But there's something more than thrills in it. The thrills are only the ripples on the surface. The real love is the quiet deep water underneath. That's what we've got, darling. It will last us all our lives."

They had come down to Barton's Close, where the thick grass had already hidden all signs of the dis-

turbance to which it had been subjected. They found a bank on the edge of it bright with primroses, upon which the sun was shining, and sat there for a time. Looking over the rich green carpet of the meadow, it was natural that they should fall into talk of the disturbances that had had their rise here; for there was no subject that they shirked, and this one had affected them deeply.

"Of course it was nothing in itself," Norman said. "If it hadn't been for an accident here and there, they would have settled it at once. Father says that. It began with their writing letters to one another, instead of talking it over. Then when they did talk the quarrel had gone too far."

"Does Uncle Bill talk about it still?"

"He talked about it yesterday. He feels it very much still."

"Poor Uncle Bill! But I've thought about it a lot, and I don't love him any less because of it. If he weren't sorry about it himself, I suppose it would make a difference. But I know he did love my darling Daddy; they loved one another underneath it all. They both knew it at the last. When father couldn't speak any more, and Uncle Bill took my hand in his, and said he would look after me and all of us, I could tell by the way he looked at him that that was what he wanted. Oh, they did love one another, I know. If only that quarrel hadn't come between them, almost at the last! Why do people quarrel who love one another?"

"I think that we ought not to make too much of it,

Pam darling. I've thought about it too. It's because poor Uncle Edmund died that it seems so important. If he had lived they would have made it up. They couldn't have helped themselves, because of what they really were to one another. Then it would all have been forgotten very quickly; and I should think they would both have been careful that it shouldn't happen again."

"Yes, I dare say that's true. But it just shows that it doesn't do for people who love one another to let themselves quarrel at all. We never will, will we?"

They agreed upon that, and upon many other things. Then they walked slowly back to the Hall together, hand in hand part of the way. Miss Baldwin, from her watch tower of the schoolroom window, saw them under the trees before they came out on to the lawn as separate units. She had seen few signs of the emotion she had craved for between them, and to catch that glimpse of them together pleased her. It was the right ending of the story whose vicissitudes she had watched with such interest. Its later chapters had been sadder than she had anticipated, and her sympathies had of late been more human than literary with the family with whom she lived. But the shadow of loss seemed to be lifting, in these sunny spring days. It was not forbidden to her now to weave her tales around them. Already she scented another absorbing romance to unfold itself before her eyes. And with this one, the interest of which she might have expected to come to an end with the approaching pealing of wedding bells, she found herself still looking forward.

For if you could take leave of the heroes and heroines of fiction at the church door, with no wish to follow their fortunes further, it was not so with those with whom you had come to feel a living sympathy. For them a new story was beginning, from which as much happiness was to be looked for as from the one that had led up to it.

THE END

Date Due			
JUL 17 '68			

WITHDRAWN

AY
11/35h Marshall, A

Hall and the grange

435

Charlotte County Library
3 0000 00031 3886